MOTHERS OF MEN

WILLIAM HENRY WARNER
AND DE WITTE KAPLAN

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MOTHERS OF MEN

"YOU!" SHE BREATHED.

MOTHERS OF MEN

By

WILLIAM HENRY WARNER

AND

DE WITTE KAPLAN

With Frontispiece by E. L. Blumenschein

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MOTHERS OF MEN

CHAPTER I

Marie sat staring at the thin, hard-featured man opposite her. His eyes, through the great bone spectacles, were magnified till they looked like some gigantic insect's, and his nervous hands shuffled among the papers on the table before him.

"I'm sorry, Miss Helmar," he said, "very sorry, but that is all there is. Your father was a man who indulged his hobbies, and you must admit that a hobby which carries one into every country on the globe is rather expensive."

Across the girl's mind came the image of her father, whom she had followed weeping to the cemetery only yesterday. His tall, thin figure, with its haggard, pain-racked face, was clearly before her mental vision.

When her mother, who was now only a shadowy remembrance, had faded out of her life, Marie had been taken to the convent and left with the nuns. Her childhood had been passed in even, colorless days, in which the monotony had only been broken when she had been called into the library once a week to hear the letter from her father, who was wandering in far countries, which, for her, meant only the colored maps in her geography books.

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It seemed little longer than yesterday, when the Mother Superior had sent for her that last time. She could almost hear the gentle voice now.

"Your father is coming home to Vienna, Marie. He writes he has had his solicitor take a house for him on the *Blumen Strasse*. You are to leave us, dear child, and make a home for him."

This wonderful father of whom she had been dreaming, was going to take her with him to a home of their own! She had wanted so to belong to some one. The holiday time had always meant heart-aches for her. She could remember how wistfully she had stood with her small face pressed against the convent windows, watching her schoolmates as they left to spend those days at home. She remembered how bare and empty the convent had looked after they were gone, and she had been left to wander about alone, till the school days should begin again. The small, hard pillow on her narrow bed, would be soaked with tears as she read and re-read the small packet of letters from her father, that told her so little. These quiet years, while they had succeeded in suppressing her natural affection, had only stored it away as it were, and the girl was pathetically eager to pour it out to the father whom she scarcely knew.

The wonder and interest of those first few months, woke in her mind ideals and dreams she had never had in the seclusion of the convent, where her day had been bounded by prayers in the morning and the vesper bell at night.

Professor Helmar's life had been wrapped up in his pretty wife. She had been much younger than

the reticent, rather shy man, whose interests were all centered in the dry dust of forgotten ages, until the living sunshine of her own hair had flashed across his gray vista. There had been six joyous, wonderful years, and then suddenly she had gone, leaving the place she had filled, empty indeed. Her short illness and death had been a blow so severe to him, that he hesitated only long enough to put their little daughter, whose golden hair reminded him too forcibly of his loss, in the care of the nuns, then threw himself once more into his researches among the ruins of antiquity.

That was twelve years ago, and weary at last, longing for the companionship of the daughter who was the symbol of the love that had meant so much to him, he had come back. And in this short year, Marie, wide-eyed and passionately eager to be all that this wonderful father wanted her to be, had blossomed from the shy convent child into the promise of charming young womanhood.

The little house in the *Blumen Strasse* was filled with his books, and the pictures her mother had loved. The girl, inspired by her father, came to know and understand art, for Professor Helmar's quest after the evolution of beauty, had carried him through the ages, from its shadowy beginning among the great temples of Egypt, to its culmination in the Greece of Pericles. Then, like a bolt out of the blue, had come his last illness and death, and now she was alone.

Something of all this flashed across her mind in the few seconds the solicitor waited for his answer, much

as a man's life passes before him when he is drowning. She looked about her helplessly.

"But," she scarcely recognized her own voice, "what am I to do?"

"That, my dear young lady," this time the solicitor looked over the great spectacles, "is something you will have to decide for yourself. Your father gave you a very good education, I believe."

"I was at the Sacred Heart Convent from the time I was six until just about a year ago. They taught me French and music, and a little drawing. I never thought I should have to use them." Indeed, the idea that the necessities of life were not one's by right, had never entered her mind.

The solicitor was beginning to gather up the papers.

"We never know, my dear young lady, when we will be overtaken by adversity. It is always well to have something to fall back upon. Couldn't you teach—er—say French? Music?"

Marie's tear-filled eyes wandered about the tasteful room. With what happiness she had come here, and after so brief a space of time, this overwhelmingly crushing blow. All her brief life, sheltered as it had been in the convent, her mind had never dwelt upon the nature of material things. There had always been new, clean frocks for her. There had always been sufficient food to eat without the thought of how it had been provided, always the haven of her scrupulously clean, little white room. These things all were, there was no thought in her

mind of how they came to be, nor the possibility that they would ever cease to exist.

But now, the meaning of the shriveled old solicitor's words were making themselves plain to her. The means of a livelihood had been taken away. She must, in order to live, provide for herself, either through some physical exertion, or some mental effort. What was she to do?

She had never learned to walk alone. The quiet cloisters, the sweet-faced nuns, had been a prop on which she had leaned. When her father had returned from those journeys into foreign lands, where his discoveries and scientific studies had furnished dreams for her lonely childhood, she had leaned as heavily on him, and now that this support had been taken away, she stood like one swaying dizzily on the edge of a precipice.

It was so short a time ago, only a year, that he had returned, but how different from the strong, stalwart, handsome man she had been expecting.

Again his face seemed to float before her, pale, thin, drawn with suffering, with its sad eyes always seeming to ask for something. Her poor father! The love and companionship she had dreamed of had been too long deferred, and he had gone away on that last great journey, only to leave her worse than alone in the end.

"I suppose you will not want to keep up this place," the solicitor's voice broke in on her thoughts, "it will be quite beyond your affording."

She looked about her at the things she had learned to love. After the bare convent walls, the simple

beauty of this little home, had seemed luxury itself. The really fine etchings which had been her mother's, the delicate little Tanagra figurines her father had brought her, the bits of Pompeiian glass flashing back the prismatic colors of the tears that must once have filled them, the little bronze Narcissus, which she had loved above everything, must she give them all up?

Through the long windows she caught a glimpse of the tiny garden where her father and she had always had their coffee. The old locust tree was even now dropping its fragrant white petals on the flagging. He had loved the scent of these white blossoms! How could she leave it all?

"Where shall I go? Where can I go?" She was frightened; the world seemed such a vast, unexplored place to her who had known only the convent and these sheltered walls.

The papers were all gathered together now, and the hands of the solicitor were busy putting them carefully into his black leather portfolio.

"You have about two thousand crowns, Miss Helmar," he told her, "to be exact, I should say, that after all expenses are paid, there will be about one hundred crowns a month for you, for a year. That is not a munificent sum, but it will maintain you until you begin to earn your living."

Marie looked helplessly about her. Her knowledge of money was not very extensive, but she knew that one hundred crowns a month would not even begin to pay the rent of this little nest her father had brought her to. And there was the housekeeper to be paid, food to be bought, clothes. She sighed.

"Where shall I go to live?" she faltered.

"You will find many places, many places," reassured the solicitor, "I dare say I may be able to find you—er—one or two pupils—er—if you are not exorbitant in your prices."

"Oh, no, I'll not be," she answered him eagerly. "I'll ask the least possible, Herr Gutman. I—I suppose I had better seek a room for myself this—this afternoon?"

"The sooner, the better," the tone was unsympathetic, there were too many cases such as this, stored away among his files. "The less time you stay here, the more *kronen* you will have for the year." He picked up his shining black hat, "I must bid you good morning, Miss Helmar. If there is anything I can do, let me know. Of course, I shall want to know your new address," and with a slight bow he left her.

Unpleasant as his crabbed features were, they were better than no one, and after the door had closed on his thin figure, she felt terrifyingly alone.

All her life she had been led to believe that Hunger and Want, those two cruel sisters, would never knock at her door, but here they were, actually grinning at her elbow. When this small sum that stood between her and starvation was gone, what was she to do? Suppose she couldn't get any pupils? Suppose she could find no way of earning her living. The thought sent her blond head down on her arms, and shook her slender, black-clad figure with sobs.

"Ach, Fräulein!" it was old Minna, the housekeeper, who found her, and whose broad hand tried to pat some comfort into the shaking shoulders.

"Ach, Fräulein, you must not cry so, it is much better for the good Herr to be at rest. He was in pain so long, it is much better so."

"I am alone, Minna, I am alone," sobbed the girl, "nobody wants me, nobody needs me, I'm alone."

Minna dabbed her eye with the corner of her stiff white apron.

"You must not cry, Fräulein," she begged, "you must not cry! Come, lie down awhile, and when you are rested, you will feel better!"

"I must leave here, Minna," sobbed the girl, "I have no money now—I'm—I'm poor—I must go away—to-day. I don't know where! I don't know where!"

Minna's broad bosom heaved sympathetically.

"Why not go back to the good sisters at the Sacred Heart?" she suggested.

"That was my thought," replied Marie between her sobs, and indeed, all that first bitter night after her father's death, she had longed for the comforting arms of the Mother Superior, and the little French sister who had been her dearest friend.

"Why not go there, then?" The problem seemed so simple to the good German woman.

"I promised father," explained Marie, "that I wouldn't. You see, he was always afraid I would become a nun. He said I was never meant to be shut away from the world; but, oh, Minna, I'm so afraid."

"Tut-tut, Fräulein, what need you fear?" For Minna there was no danger that she could not meet with the aid of her ready tongue and able arms. "Can't you keep this pretty house?"

"I am poor now, Minna," Marie told her sadly. "I must find a place not so expensive, I must find pupils," and at the thought the golden head went down again on her folded arms.

The old woman stared at her.

"What about me?" she asked.

Marie lifted her head, startled.

"I don't know," she said, "I hadn't thought!"

Minna pursed her lips, her brow wrinkling into a heavy frown for a moment, then suddenly, her face cleared.

"Don't mind about me, Fräulein," she said. "I have been wanting a rest. I shall take it for a week. After that there are plenty of places for good housekeepers."

"But where can I go?" The blue eyes were very wistful, the world seemed so terrifyingly large and strange.

Minna thought a moment.

"If the Fräulein would not find it too plain," she ventured, "I can take her to a nice place."

"Nothing is too plain, Minna; don't you understand that I am poor? Will you take me there, now?"

"Of course, I will." Minna was all eagerness. "It is quite on the other side of the city, Fräulein, but it is clean, and I think we can get it cheap. My friend is a musician," this with some pride, "he and his wife live there. I'll get my bonnet. We'll go right away!" and she bustled out to prepare for the journey.

Marie sat a moment looking about her. The things

she loved and which her father had taught her to understand, everything that had grown dear to her, she must leave them all, for the grim-faced Herr Gutman had made it very plain to her that it was only by selling all these that she was to have the means to live at all.

Slowly, she rose to her feet, and went into her little room with its pretty pink and white hangings, its dainty bed. For a long time she stood and stared at herself in the mirror. The sad face stared back at her, made whiter by the black of her mourning frock. There were deep shadows under her blue eyes, one or two strands of fair hair had escaped from their fastenings. Wearily she brushed them back and dried her tears. She pulled a small black leather trunk out of the cupboard and began packing it. The tears started afresh as she laid her belongings neatly in the trays and put in the dainty piles of lingerie. Marie loved beautiful things; she loved to feel the touch of fine linen next to her white skin. She loved the dainty ribbons, tied across her young breast. But ribbons, bows and silk stockings would be impossible in the future.

The last frock packed, the last pair of shoes put in, she closed and locked the little trunk, then, with trembling lips, she pinned on her black hat and slipped into her coat.

"I'm ready, Minna," she called, as she came back into the living-room, "we must waste no time."

The good woman bustled in, resplendent in her Sunday bonnet.

"I'm ready too, Fräulein," she said as she but-

toned across her ample bosom the jacket that had evidently been made for her in less buxom days. "I'm ready too, shall we start?"

With a last look back, Marie went down the stairs and out into that world of which she knew so little.

CHAPTER II

During the long ride across the city, old Minna kept up a steady chatter. Her one idea was to comfort the girl. There was no thought of her own necessity for seeking a new position. There were plenty of places for cooks and housekeepers, but this frail little creature, who sat beside her with the black veil drawn down over her face to hide the tears, what could she do?

Presently they got off the tram, and Minna leading the way, hurried up a narrow street, filled with children and gossiping women. They turned in at a doorway next to a delicatessen shop. On the steps, a little girl of about eight, with very tightly braided hair, was hushing a fat baby to sleep. The child moved aside for them to pass, and they made their way up the long, dark stair. The air was heavy with the smell of cooking, mixed with that of hot soapsuds.

Two flights up, Minna knocked loudly at a door, in front of which a tiny point of gas was sputtering in a crooked jet.

The door was opened by a thin, little woman, in a clean calico dress, with a small black apron tied over it. She wore great round spectacles, through which her sharp black eyes twinkled. She tipped her chin in a curious way, as she looked at them.

"Ach, Minna," she cried, cordially, "come in, come in. It is so long since Shatzi and I have seen you."

She held the door wide, and Minna stood aside for Marie to enter.

"I have brought a young lady," she said, "who wants a room to live in. I told her I thought you might have a place for her."

Their hostess pushed forward a chair for Marie and motioned Minna to a seat on the sofa.

"Sit down, sit down," she said hospitably, "I'll get a cup of coffee and some *kuchen*, and then we can talk," and she bustled out to prepare refreshments for her guests.

Marie glanced about the neat little room. Against the walls were arranged stiffly, old-fashioned black horsehair chairs, each with a white knitted antimacassar pinned neatly on the back. In the window a canary fluted, his tiny throat swelling with ecstatic trills as he swung in his cage over the shining leaves of a little rubber tree. Primly in its corner stood the sofa, place of honor, where Minna now sat, her holiday finery spread out about her.

On the tiny mantel stood a crowd of china ornaments, jolly looking little dogs with huge bows about their necks, gilt and blue shepherdesses, very small vases, decorated with very large roses. In the center, a faded photograph of an empty-faced little girl with two blond braids over her shoulders, stared stiffly out of a frame made of sea shells and dried flowers twined about the ornately lettered phrase, "*In liebender Erinnerung*." Marie, reading the tender phrase, smiled wistfully. No one was so plain or so unimportant but that in some heart they were enshrined "in loving memory."

She was impressed by the spotlessness of everything. She found herself wondering, if each little object had its place marked on the shelf so that it could be put back when it had been dusted.

Over the mantel hung a brilliantly colored chromo of a sad-eyed Christ, His blue robe opened at the breast, showing a gilt and bleeding heart. There were two or three other religious pictures, but every other available space on the dingy little walls was hung with photographs of the same empty-faced little girl, in various stages of growth.

Old Minna, her hands, in their brown thread mittens, folded in her lap, sat blinking her lashless eyelids. There was always a certain dignified manner which accompanied the wearing of her best clothes, and she was wrapped in it to-day, so that Marie scarcely knew her for the same, plain-spoken, good humored old woman who had taken care of the little house in the *Blumen Strasse*.

Once or twice the girl opened her lips by way of starting a conversation, but closed them again and relapsed into an uneasy silence, suppressed by the majestic dignity of the old housekeeper.

Presently, the hostess returned with a tray, which she set on the center table, first having carefully removed the lamp and a large embossed album, and folded up into a neat square the red-fringed cloth. There was coffee in a highly decorated pot, cups equally ornate, one with a gilt initial on its side, a plate of plain cake, with a richly sugared top, and a small pitcher of milk.

"Now," she said, "while we have our coffee, we can talk. Is it a room to live in, you want?"

Marie opened her lips to answer, but Minna broke in.

"The Fräulein is the daughter of my poor master, who has just died," she said. The little old woman shook her head in pity, glancing at Marie over the edge of her spectacles like a bright-eyed bird. "She is quite poor now," continued the housekeeper, "ach, yes, even rich folks can spend all their money, and now she's all alone. I think it would be nice for you to have her here."

Their hostess tilted her chin grotesquely as she eyed the girl through her thick glasses.

"We have an extra room, yes, it would be company for me while Shatzi is away," and then quite suddenly she turned to Minna. "She looks like Frieda," she said softly, her eyes straying mistily to the many pictures of the empty-faced little girl, "she can stay with us."

Marie smiled at her gratefully, glancing somewhat dubiously at Frieda's photograph. This would be much better than going out among people of whom she knew nothing. Herr Gutman was to attend to the selling of her few belongings. Minna could close the house and send her trunk. She would go now to the solicitor's office and make arrangements.

Frau Schultz showed them the little room she was to occupy. There was a narrow yellowish wooden bed in it, with a starched counterpane and a stiffly frilled pillow sham across which was embroidered in red, "*Guten Morgen.*" Over the yellow wooden

dresser hung a cheap mirror. The glass was wavy and blotched in places where the mercury had worn away. Marie wondered, as she saw the distorted reflection of herself, if the compliment Frau Schultz had paid her had been deserved. A small chair completed the furnishings, excepting a small plaster figure of the Virgin against the wall, with a holy water stoup under it. It was a tiny cupboard of a place, but neat and spotless. Marie stood and looked down from the small window into the courtyard onto which it gave. Between the houses hung rows of freshly washed linen, all manner of garments swinging in shameless abandon, but the courtyard, though barren and unattractive, was scrupulously clean. She thought of the cool sweetness of the garden she was leaving, of the old locust tree and its falling blossoms, the comfortable wicker chair in which her father used to sit through the sunny mornings. She turned away with a sigh, her heart heavy, a lump rising in her throat. Frau Schultz, standing at her elbow, peered at her with her bird-like eyes, and the girl felt instinctively that she had found some one who would be kind.

She broached the price shyly, timidly it was acquiesced in by Frau Schultz, and decisively settled by the capable Minna.

Then they went back into the little parlor again, and to the accompaniment of Hanzi, the canary's, operatic warblings, Minna had two more cups of coffee and another piece of *kuchen*. Then, brushing the crumbs from her ample lap, she rose to go.

"I'll send your trunk right away, Fräulein," she said.

"When can I come to stay?" Marie asked timidly.

"As soon as you wish, Fräulein," said Frau Schultz hospitably. "You can stay now if you want to. We are very simple people. You are like our Frieda. We'll watch over you."

Marie explained that she must go to the solicitor's office and arrange her affairs, and that she would be back as soon as she could, to stay, so with many exchanges of hearty good will between Minna and Frau Schultz, and the promise of care for Marie, they started down the dark stair again, Minna to go back to the house to close it, Marie to arrange about the source of her hundred *kronen*.

CHAPTER III

The first few weeks in her new home were not so unpleasant as Marie had anticipated. Frau Schultz and her good husband took the girl under their wing, and in their simple kindly way, tried to help her fit herself to her new environment.

After all, it is only the transition period that is difficult for any of us to live through. We adjust ourselves rapidly to the life that lies on either side of it, but in that short span between what was and what is to be, lies our keenest sorrow and suffering.

After the first hard wrench that carried her out of the little house in the *Blumen Strasse* into these very different surroundings, Marie began to enjoy the companionship of the old couple.

Herr Schultz, Shatzi, as his wife called him, played the piano in a café in an out-of-the-way corner of the city. He was a heavy, rather stupid old man, who had lived his life pounding out indifferent music on café pianos. His round, prominent eyes looked out into the world with a mild wonder. His thick gray hair was rough and unkempt, and his shabby clothes kept his neat wife busy brushing away the spots which, in spite of her vigilance, would persist in garnishing them. His heavy mouth always wore a half-childish smile, and his manner was one of apology for his very existence, but his little wife, with her wrinkled face, her sharp old eyes, lived only for him. At first Marie wondered, but she came to under-

stand that no man can be so utterly devoid of attraction, but that some woman will love him.

These simple people took the girl to their hearts. They were staunch socialists who believed firmly in the tenets of their order, still they realized that the accident of birth which had placed them in the social status in which they lived, made them not inferior, but different from those who occupied a higher stratum of society. They had not failed to observe the difference between Marie and themselves, yet it was not in the least an obstacle to the mutual respect and love which increased as the days passed.

Their own daughter, whose photograph was omnipresent, they had lost years before. Frau Schultz, whose fond, though mistaken imagination had seen a resemblance in Marie's blond prettiness to the plain Frieda, pointed it out to her husband, who, always ready to acquiesce with her opinions, eagerly agreed.

The tiny flat, with its old-fashioned furniture, with Hanzi, the canary, singing in his cage, and the shining leaves of the little rubber tree in the corner, came to mean home to Marie.

The furnishings of her father's house realized less than Herr Gutmann had anticipated. While the money lasted, Marie busied herself helping Frau Schultz about her duties and sewing buttons on the shirts which the thrifty little woman made to eke out the scanty exchequer.

In her inexperience, she had believed that the world was made up of people like her father and the nuns at the convent. People who were kind and thought-

ful, considerate of the feelings of others, each man ready and willing to help his weaker brother. The splendor and riches that sparkled along the boulevards, the fertile fields, with their bounteous harvests that spread about the convent, this was the world to her. She had no realization that there might be people who could have no share in all this. She had supposed that she would always be surrounded by the comforts of a home such as the little house in the *Blumen Strasse*. The sudden awakening out of this pleasing supposition, had left her dazed, breathless, as one would feel when a supposedly secure shelter had been suddenly shattered by wanton hands.

Although Marie's education at the convent had given her no definite training for earning her living, still she was not without an inherent quality of courage, that dogged something that had made her father go on with his life when his heart was in the grave. With her natural timidity, she shrank from contact with the world of which she knew so little, but the realization that her money was fast dwindling away, warned her that a means of augmenting her slender resources, must be found. Mentally shutting her eyes, and gulping as a child does before taking a dose of bitter medicine, she faced the situation.

Herr Gutmann managed to get two pupils for her. Twice a week, Marie went to teach them the scales.

One was the small daughter of a rich brewer. She was a delicate, weak-eyed child, without any initiative or interest in anything. She always seemed to Marie like a pale spot in the gloom of the huge

drawing-room. Her thin legs, dangling down from the music bench seemed ever to be seeking a resting-place, and her transparent fingers played the scales in a tinkling, apologetic way, making the same mistakes in the same places, lesson after lesson. When Marie's patience gave out, which was seldom, for she loved children and even had a spark of affection for this unresponsive little creature, the pale eyes would blink at her uncomprehendingly, and the thin fingers would tinkle out the same mistakes in the same way.

Her other pupil was a boy of eleven, a square, flat-faced youngster who hated the lessons and spent his time between them in devising methods of annoyance for his patient teacher. He was never happier than when, with both feet on the pedals he would come crashing down on the keys, till poor Marie held her ears in terror, for the boy's mother was nervous and abhorred noise of any kind, and each lesson ended in the servant bringing word that the *Gnädige Frau* could not be disturbed any longer.

But even for these two pupils, Marie was grateful. The money she earned, she put away to be used when her own supply should have vanished.

The sum in the savings-box was still pitifully small, when one day the servant, coming in with the usual message about the *Gnädige Frau's* nervousness, added that the noise disturbed her, so that in the future, she would be obliged to have the lessons discontinued. With an extra crash on the long-suffering piano keys, the square-faced youngster announced that he was glad, that he hated music, he hated teachers, hated

everything in general and Marie in particular, and bounced out of the room.

The girl stood for a moment staring blankly at the servant who grinned as she held the door open for her. She could hear the thumping footsteps of her pupil as he bounded up the stair, and his voice came down to her shouting his joy at the dismissal of the hated teacher.

Her heart sank as she went down the steps into the street. There was still the pale-eyed child, however, and the money left by her father was not yet quite exhausted, why let this curt dismissal prey on her so? She squared her shoulders and lifted her chin. Things hadn't reached their worst yet.

It was raining a sad sort of drizzle that made it difficult to be cheerful, and it was with a vague foreboding that she turned into the street where the other pupil lived, and rang the bell of the big house.

The man servant who let her in, took her umbrella and threw open the door of the gloomy room. She missed the apologetic tinkle of the scales which usually came from somewhere out of the distance. Her eyes growing accustomed to the semi-darkness, she saw the pale-eyed child sitting at the piano, her dangling feet groping for a resting-place, her thin hands idle on the keys. When the man had closed the door, the child slid from the piano bench.

"Fräulein," she said, "I don't have to take any lesson to-day, the doctor says it is bad for my eyes."

Marie paused in her task of unrolling her music.

"When shall I come then?" she asked.

"Oh," and there was a quick note of pleasure in

the colorless little voice which hurt the girl to hear, "I don't have to take any more lessons at all. Here's a note from mamma," and she handed her a small white envelope.

Marie took it with trembling fingers. She opened the note and found it to be a formal one of dismissal on account of the child's health. It enclosed a small sum still due.

Marie walked home through the rain. Surely this great world that she had seen stretch away in such fertile fields from the convent windows, had enough to spare for one girl who wanted so little. The uneven distribution of material things had never touched her before. Now she was beginning to realize that there were those who had more than they could use, and yet held tightly to it all. How few there were like the father whom she had lost, whose religion it had been to share with his fellow men.

She climbed the long flights to the little Schultz flat, disheartened. Her landlady's sharp eyes took in the situation at a glance.

"Both of them stopping, Fräulein?" she asked, "never mind, drink your coffee and to-morrow you can find others." Her optimism stilled Marie's fears and as she sipped the steaming beverage and munched the cake Frau Schultz was noted for, she planned how she would find other pupils.

And now began long days of seeking for something into which her poor little convent-learned accomplishments would fit.

But nobody seemed to want to study music. Her French was nearly perfect, the good nuns at the

Sacred Heart had seen to that. She tried to find some one who wished to learn, but though it happened that just then the study of the French language was very popular in Vienna, everyone wanted a Mademoiselle from Paris.

She knew a little singing, a little drawing; a little, but not enough of anything. Her drawing, she tried to utilize, but no one wanted to learn the gentle art of sketching in water colors or making dainty pen drawings. The time had gone by for that, there were too many art schools where one could learn to paint boldly from the nude, in garish colors, futurist canvasses.

How many others were trying as she was trying. How much more competition than things for which to compete. This world, that seen from the convent windows, had seemed all peaceful fields, green and tranquil, that had given her kindness and comfort in her father's house, what a different aspect it wore, now that she had stepped down from her sheltered nook.

To Marie, facing it like a timid hare brought to bay, it seemed like a pack of snarling hounds, quarreling over bones thrown from some more fortunate table, wrangling and fighting, climbing on the shoulders of each other, ruthlessly trampling down the weaker. She was frightened, yet filled with a bitter wonder that here, suffering was not only a possibility, but a certainty.

The pillow on her little yellow bed was soaked with many tears, frightened, disappointed tears, and still, through it all the thoughtfulness and gen-

erosity of these two old people with whom she made her home, kept alive in her heart faith in human nature. They had so little and yet that little was divided gladly with one less fortunate than they.

The year was nearly gone now and so was the money. Soon she would have to supply herself from the small box of savings, and after that, she dared not think. She could not be a burden to these kindly people, knowing, as she did, that there was scarcely enough for themselves, and that, only, with the help of what she was paying for her tiny room.

One evening, Herr Schultz came home with the announcement that there was a chance for her if she cared to take it, singing in the little café where he played.

"The salary is very small, Fräulein," he said, "but I shall be there to bring you home each night, and your voice is not a bad one."

Marie loathed the very thought of doing such a thing, but she dared not refuse with a knowledge of her ever-dwindling funds, and the danger of at last living on the Schultz's bounty, so it was decided that she was to go with the old man the next day and apply for the position.

"Have you a pretty dress, Marie?" asked Herr Schultz. "You will have to wear something with no neck or sleeves."

Marie made a mental inventory of her wardrobe. There was a simple frock that could be arranged, so she nodded. The old man rubbed his hands.

"Now," he said, "come and sing some of the Schubert Lieder, or perhaps a little Grieg."

Her voice was a small high soprano, with a very sweet note in it, and her natural appreciation for all that was beautiful and tender, gave her singing an appealing quality that more than compensated for its lack of volume.

The old man was delighted.

"Good!" he said. "We go to-morrow," and Frau Schultz nodded approval, as she threaded a needle, her small head on one side, the bird-like eyes squinting at her work.

The café or tingle-tangle where old Schultz played, was one of the sort the outside world referred to as Bohemian, tucked away in an obscure corner of the city. The proprietor was an oily-faced man whose good humor depended entirely upon the amount of patronage his house received.

He nodded to old Schultz and looked Marie over appraisingly. He noted with approval her blue eyes and delicate features. The mourning frock, for she still wore black, set off the gold of her hair.

"Sing for me," he said, and to Schultz's accompaniment and with her heart pounding, Marie sang.

"H'm," grunted the proprietor, "the voice will do, but Gott, those songs, do you think this is a church? Find something lively, something gay, a bit—you know," and the girl felt her face flush at his tone.

She was about to say she couldn't, but she thought of the little that stood between her and starvation, and that not only she, but the good people with whom she lived, needed this position, so swallowing hard, she said she would try.

"And your dress," the proprietor called after them

as she and the old man were leaving, "mind you put some dash in it!"

"It will be all right," soothed Schultz, when they were walking down the street together, "don't mind, *kleinchen,* I'll be there to take care of you. We'll go now and pick out some songs, and to-night the good *Frau* will help you fix up the dress."

They went into a music shop, in the window of which hung a gaudy display of popular music. With the help of an anæmic youth who stood behind the counter and ogled Marie, they selected four or five, and having paid for them out of her slender purse, they started home. All that afternoon they went over the songs, the old man explaining to her how she must sing them, with more dash, more life, and the girl going over them patiently.

"Can't I put in one of the Schubert songs?" she begged. "Just so I won't feel so terribly away from myself?" and after a good deal of debate, they settled on "Impatience," trusting that its swift-rung cadence might make up for its very evident incongruity to the surroundings.

All evening, Frau Schultz and Marie pulled and snipped and sewed at the simple frock, trying to arrange it so as to please her new employer, and when at last the girl stood before the little mirror and looked at her reflection, she was startled at the change she saw. Her slender arms were white, even against the white of the gown, and her almost childish throat and young bosom with its delicate curves looked very lovely where the lace fell away. She had piled her hair high on her head, and the good Frau,

after searching among her belongings, had unearthed an old-fashioned high comb which she had insisted upon her wearing.

"You look very sweet," she said, "to-morrow you'll win every one's heart."

"I don't want to do that," sighed Marie. "It's a horrid place, really Frau Schultz, but I must do my best. That means a lot to all of us, doesn't it?"

The good little woman kissed her.

"There, there," she said, "if things don't go right, you must not worry. Shatzi and I are always here. Now go to bed," and with a kind little pat, she took the lamp and left her, closing the door after her.

For a long time Marie sat and looked at the girl in the mirror. What would be the outcome of this venture, she wondered. What would her father have said, if he could have known. If she could have looked ahead, how she would have hated the little white dress that she laid aside so carefully, how she would have hated the old-fashioned comb, which she drew out to permit her wonderful hair to come tumbling about her shoulders.

What an all wise Providence it is that has made us blind to what lies before us! How few would have the courage to go on if they could look even one day ahead!

As she turned down her lamp and slipped into bed, her only thought was, could she manage to keep this place that had come to her when she so much needed it.

CHAPTER IV

The "Two Eagles" was one of those little cafés which abound in Vienna; good beer, music, and freedom; the rendezvous of students, with a fair sprinkling of the military.

To Marie, peeping out from the tiny, none-too-clean room, they had given her to dress in, it seemed far worse than it really was, for the girl's eyes had only looked on life at the convent, and from the windows of her father's house. The clicking of the steins on the bare tables, the rough voices of the waiters as they hurried back and forth, the scraping of chairs on the sanded floor, the floating layers of blue smoke through which the lights blurred, the students with their wide black ties and unkempt hair, with here and there a splash of color where some officers sat sprawled about a table. This was a world of which she had never dreamed, and she shrank instinctively from its cheap tawdriness. Through it all, breaking out in shrill peals, or suppressed giggles, came the laughter of women. Laughter more than anything is indicative of caste, and this coarse mirth was strange to Marie's ears.

Away at the far end, was the platform on which Herr Schultz was playing the piano, with a white-faced, wizened young man beside him, scraping on a violin.

How was she to get there? The time had come. One of the greasy waiters had just knocked at her

door and told her they were ready, but the route lay in and out among those many tables, those staring faces. She never knew how she reached the platform. She was keenly conscious of the scraping of her shoes on the sanded floor, and of the voices about her.

One woman laughed in a sneering way as she passed her table, and her companion reached out and tried to grab Marie's hand. In pulling away, she almost fell over the shining boot of a young, round-faced officer, a boot which had been thrust in her way purposely, and whose owner roared with mirth at her terrible confusion. She was vaguely conscious of an older man at his side, at whose sharp word the offending boot was withdrawn. As she passed, here and there rough voices flung appraising phrases at her, that sent the blood flaming into her cheeks.

But after what seemed an interminable journey, she at last reached the little platform and the shelter of Herr Schultz's side.

"Never mind, child," whispered the kindly old man, "you'll grow used to it all. What shall we sing first?"

Marie's heart was in her throat. She felt as though she never should be able to even speak, to sing was an impossibility. The white-faced violinist murmured an encouraging word. Herr Schultz patted her arm, his weak mouth tremulous with reassuring smiles.

She told herself that she was in no way a part of this cheap, vulgar place. It need not touch her. She was there to sing, to earn her living. Her cheeks burned, but she swallowed bravely, and as Herr Schultz struck the opening chords, she turned and

faced the room, which seemed to swim in the blue haze of the tobacco smoke. Before her eyes was a blur of black and white, with here and there a spot of color made by some soldier's uniform. Her small, sweet voice trembled, and she sang the rollicking music-hall ditty, as though it were a sentimental ballad, but she seemed to have struck the vacuous fancy of the young officer, over whose foot she had tripped, and while her voice still clung to the last note, he acclaimed his approval.

Indeed she seemed to have pleased the majority of her audience, who, with their characteristic love of music, applauded vociferously, pounding on the tables with their beer mugs and shouting noisily.

She resumed her seat with the pleasure that appreciation, from no matter how mean a source, always brings.

As she waited while the old man turned over the music before beginning another song, her eyes were caught and held by the pale blue ones of the young officer who had started the applause. She felt her face grow scarlet under his gaze. Some intangible instinct warned her of danger, but she was grateful to him for his demonstration of approval, so she tried to force her trembling lips to smile her thanks. He was quite young, his pale blond hair worn stiff in the familiar paint-brush style, was almost white against his flushed forehead, and his full lips were very red. He was sprawled in his chair with his thick legs in their tight blue trousers, straight out before him, his head sunk between his shoulders. The man at his side touched him quietly on the arm and said

a few words which Marie could not catch. The youth pulled himself together and turned once more to the table and through all of her next song, which was the Schubert one, he paid no more heed to her. Even at its conclusion, he did not vouchsafe the approbation he had given her at first. But the rest of the room was unanimous in their praise.

She was trembling. She had pleased them, and she was so anxious to please. Herr Schultz looked at her proudly over his shoulder, as he struck the opening chords for the white-faced violinist, who smirked at her.

After a brief rest, she rose at the old man's nod, and sang again, and again, till her throat felt tight, her voice grew husky and her eyes smarted with the unaccustomed tobacco fumes. But her audience was insatiable.

A noisy student rapped loudly on his table and called for yet another song. His companions echoed the command and leered laughingly into her face.

From another table in a corner, a fat, oily looking man with diamonds on his fingers, and a heavy triple chin, beckoned to her with what he must have thought was an ingratiating smile. But the woman with him, a slim, dark little creature, with thickly rouged lips and cloudy black hair, jerked angrily at his arm, and he swung about in his chair so that Marie saw only his great back.

Brower, the proprietor, came up and patted her roughly on the shoulder.

"She caught on, Schultz," he wheezed in his heavy

voice, that was habitually hoarse from beer and tobacco smoke. "I think she'll do!"

She had succeeded, objectionable and unpleasant as these surroundings and the people were. She had conquered, she had overcome the harrowing embarrassment that had shocked her refined nature. She felt a certain sense of pride that she had not failed, that she had not been vanquished by her weaker emotions. It gave her more confidence in herself. If she could do this, she could do other things, better, more suited to her temperament and ideals. She would endure this place only so long as she must, and at the first opportunity of a better position, leave it. Tired, but glad that for the immediate future at least she need not worry about the fewness of the pennies in her savings box, Marie slipped on her coat, and clinging to old Schultz's arm, trudged happily home.

After a few days, her shyness partly left her, she was more at ease, more sure of herself and the approval of her personality and singing was even more marked. The first time, the room had only been a blur. Her self-consciousness had made it impossible for her to note more than a vague outline, but now that the tension had relaxed somewhat, she was able to distinguish the details of her surroundings. She began to see here and there a beckoning finger that called her hospitably to share its owner's table. Sometimes she saw the angry frown and quick proprietory nudge of the woman who accompanied him and resented his interest in the little singer. She began to hear her name called in a familiar diminutive, as

groups of students would ask for favorite songs. Secure under the shelter of Herr Schultz's wing, she smiled her thanks from the platform.

One night, she stood wrapped in her cloak, waiting for her guardian as he gathered up his music. The last guest was leaving beerily, and the greasy waiters were going about turning out the lights and mopping up the splashed tables.

Brower came heavily up to the platform. He looked at Marie with an unpleasant grin.

"Tired, Fräulein?" he asked, "never mind, you'll be home in a little while. You've done very well! But to-morrow, I want you to be nice to my friends."

Herr Schultz, without turning, stopped in his task of gathering the sheets of music, and the proprietor went on.

"To-morrow I want you to pay a few visits among the tables. Remember, the more we sell to drink, the more you are worth to me."

Schultz turned quickly, his heavy eyebrows drawn together in a frown, his weak mouth working tremulously.

"The Fräulein is only here to sing," he said, his voice shaking, "she does not go down among the tables."

"What have you got to say?" thundered Brower, "If you don't like the way this place is run, you can go! There are plenty of piano-players!"

Marie looked on in terror, only half understanding. Her face went white as she realized what this would mean.

"Oh, no," she begged, "if he goes I must go."

This was not what Brower wanted. The girl had really been a profitable investment. His clientèle was pleased. New people were beginning to come. More money was being spent. Allowances must be made.

"Look here, Schultz," he growled, "everything will be all right, she needn't drink, I only want her to go about and be pleasant. You're here where you can watch her."

In Schultz's faithful breast, the knowledge of what it would mean at his age, to lose his position, struggled with his fear for Marie. Brower was right, there were so many piano-players, but he knew well what this sort of thing led to. He had seen it so often.

"She can't go down among the tables," he repeated doggedly.

Brower struggled between rage and cupidity. He would gladly have kicked the old man into the street, but the source of income which the girl meant, must not be lost.

"All right," he shrugged, and for the time, the matter was dropped.

CHAPTER V

One night, as she waited between songs, Marie let her eyes wander about the smoke-filled room and wondered, as she heard the occasional bursts of laughter, if these people who came here voluntarily were really enjoying life. She wondered if this meant happiness to them.

The ideas of right and wrong which had been learned in the convent and at home with her father, seemed so absolutely apart from what surrounded her now, that she had not even a means of comparison. This was simply different.

The young officer over whose boot she had stumbled that first night, was sitting sullenly at the table near her, and her glance wandered from him to the man at his elbow, the same who had reprimanded him for his rudeness.

He was a tall, thin man, older than the boy at his side, and wore the handsome uniform of a captain of cavalry. She was impressed by the straight, unbending attitude of his shoulders. The thin, hard mouth of the supersensualist somehow frightened her, although she was too inexperienced to know why. She was trying to analyze this fear, this aversion for a stranger, when she became conscious that he was staring at her, and for a moment she stared back fascinated into the brilliant eyes that held her own even against her will. With an effort, she turned

away hastily, and busied herself with the piece of music she was holding.

Several times during the evening, she was conscious of those magnetic eyes which she avoided with a curious flutter at her heart. She had taken her seat beside the piano, when she saw Brower standing at the edge of the platform, beckoning to her.

Hesitatingly, she rose and went to him.

"Fräulein," he said with his oily smile, "my wife is here with some friends. We want you to join us for a little while."

Schultz swung around on the piano stool.

"No," he said, emphatically.

Brower shot him a glance charged with venom, a burst of rage trembling on his lips, which he controlled with an effort.

"What's the matter?" he growled. "My wife wants to meet her. Anything wrong with that?"

There was the look in Schultz's eyes of a faithful dog which cannot express the love it feels.

"She should not——" he began, "she——"

Brower turned to Marie.

"Don't you want to come, Fräulein?" he asked.

The girl was pathetically eager to give a sufficient measure of service for the compensation she received.

"I'll go," she said, timidly.

Brower's wife was a large, boldly handsome woman of about thirty-five. She had been a very pretty girl, and in spite of the artificial yellow of her carefully dressed hair, the over-red of her lips, the paint on her cheeks, she still bore some traces of her vanished beauty. She blazed with jewels which were

obviously not all that their glitter proclaimed. To the observer it was very apparent that everything about her was a sham. It was even whispered that her marriage came under the same heading.

She greeted Marie with an over-effusiveness.

"Do sit down, *Liebchen.* My friends all like your singing so much." With a wave of her plump, bejeweled hand, she introduced the others at her table. "Herr Kranz, meet Fräulein Helmar; Herr Schnitzer, Fräulein Pragt."

Marie slipped into the chair Brower pulled out for her.

"I certainly like your singing, Fräulein," boomed Herr Kranz, in a voice that Marie felt certain must penetrate to every corner of the room; "but I like you better," and he smiled a broad smile, that lifted his heavy black mustache and showed an uneven row of discolored teeth. His prominent eyes took in her slender prettiness with an evident relish, and his thick bull-neck settled consciously into his collar as he pulled down a brilliant vest over his round paunch.

The other man who had been introduced as Herr Schnitzer, was stoop-shouldered and pale haired. His prominent Adam's apple slid up and down grotesquely as he ate the cheese sandwich that was before him.

"We like little blond singers," he said with his mouth full, but his eyes were fixed fatuously on Fräulein Pragt who simpered coyly. She was over-dressed, and over-plump, her empty, common face shone fair and bland, and her silly little red mouth was always half open.

Marie looked from one to the other with a feeling half of disgust, and half of pride in herself that she was different.

Brower patted her familiarly on the shoulder as he hailed a passing waiter.

"Fritz, bring Fräulein Helmar a sandwich and some beer," and he moved away to another table.

"Nothing for me, please," began Marie.

"Come, *Herzchen*, just a little something! One glass of beer," urged her hostess.

"I don't wish anything, thank you," said Marie, with quiet finality.

Frau Brower laughed loudly.

"No wonder you're so thin," she said, "a little more flesh on your bones wouldn't hurt you, Fräulein."

Kranz leaned toward her admiringly.

"You're young yet," he said, "you'll be just right in a year or so," and he put a moist hand over hers.

Marie shrank away, and Frau Brower laughed again offensively.

"She should have a sweetheart, Kranz, that's what she needs," she said. "Have you got one, *Liebchen?*"

Marie's face flushed.

"No," she said.

There was something about this girl's manner Frau Brower resented. She experienced the feeling all women of her type do, in the presence of one who is everything they are not. What right had she, a little singer in Brower's café, to give herself airs? She'd put her in her proper place.

"Can't you get one?" she sneered.

Marie lifted her head proudly.

"I don't believe I want one," she said simply. "I'm here to sing, I haven't time for anything else!"

Kranz was eyeing her with open admiration, his prominent, dull eyes, looking ludicrously like a fish's. The other two were deep in a conversation that consisted mainly of guttural monosyllables from Schnitzer and conscious giggles from Fräulein Pragt.

Frau Brower looked at her insolently.

"I advise you to drop that stand-offish manner. It won't pay here. A *fesches Mädel* like you ought to have a dozen lovers! I'm going to bring a friend around to meet you!"

Marie flushed at the open coarseness in her voice. She shook her head.

"Thank you, but I'd rather not meet anyone," she said. "Herr Schultz takes me home every evening. He doesn't like me to meet strangers. I don't want to do anything to offend him."

This time the laughter was general.

"What do you care what that old fossil says?" began Frau Brower, and her husband, who had joined them again, frowned darkly as he looked toward the platform.

"Look here," he growled, "what's this? Am I paying you to be a fine lady? Do you think you're an opera singer?"

Marie's lips trembled. She rose to her feet.

"Please," she faltered, "I—I think I'd better go back." She was looking into Brower's scowling face. She saw his eyes shift, and suddenly, a great change came over him. His anger seemed to vanish almost by magic, and an oily smile spread over his features.

"Never mind, Fräulein," he said, and she thought she saw him glance warningly at his wife, "we will excuse you if you want to go."

Marie turned to see the cause for this sudden change, and found herself looking straight into the burning eyes of the man who once before had come to her assistance.

He bowed slightly, with a smile that was so encouraging that the girl knew instinctively she owed Brower's change of front to his interference. Trembling, she started back to the platform, the Captain standing aside and bowing his acknowledgment of her timid smile of thanks.

This man with his polished manner, his fine carriage, his trim uniform was more like the men she had met at her father's home, more her own class. His thin, aquiline face had smiled on her with what, in her ignorance of the world, she took to be kindly, fraternal interest.

Frau Brower, meanwhile, had watched this little by-play. Her face reddened under its coat of rouge.

"Brower," she choked, "are you going to be browbeaten in your own café?"

Her husband tried to stop her, a curious look of fear coming into his eyes as he glanced hurriedly at the Captain's table, but she went on angrily.

"Aren't you master in your own house? I wouldn't be ordered around by any——"

The man put a heavy hand on her arm.

"*Halt's Maul*, you fool," he said. "You don't know what you're saying, he's——" He bent and whispered something in her ear. What he said had the

effect of instantly dissipating her wrath, and she, too, turned and glanced fearfully in the direction of the tall officer.

Brower swore under his breath and turned heavily away, leaving the others to comfort his spouse.

This was the beginning of Marie's visits among the tables. Once, Brower called her to explain one of her songs to a "particular friend" of his. Another time, she must go and ask some officers what they wanted her to sing next. Schultz, with a heavy heart had to let her go.

The Captain, whose friendly smile had struck an answering note in her heart, came sometimes three or four nights consecutively. Then, perhaps a week or ten days would elapse during which Marie looked in vain for the tall, lean figure. She forgot her vague fears of his cruel mouth anl brilliant eyes. Her heart was so sore and lonely in this unaccustomed place that it was a disappointment to her when she missed him. She had a curious sense of protection and security whenever the bright note of his uniform came through the green swinging-door, and he made his way to his usual table.

There was an undefinable air of reticence, a touch of the mystic about him, which aroused a feeling of interested curiosity in the girl's heart.

As she waited between songs, her naturally active mind amused itself by trying to read the different faces she saw before her. This man was the only one of whom she could form no conception. All the others were obviously what they were, he alone was different. And because it is the unknown which

attracts, and because he had on several instances shielded her from rudeness, she began to think of him as a friend.

There was no one to point out to her that the brilliant eyes were cold and calculating, that the lines about the thin mouth and between his brows, were those experience writes. There was no one to tell her that this face which seemed to smile so kindly into hers, was that of a man who knows his ability to judge and compare the values of sophistication and inexperience, and who has used this knowledge for the domination and destruction of those weaker than himself.

One evening as she sat watching him, he glanced about the room in a coldly speculative fashion, as one who sees a vision that includes those about him. If she were priviliged to see the picture in his mind she would have seen the gay uniforms about her changed into a dull gray, the jauntily set caps replaced by spiked helmets. A cold smile played about the thin lips, and his hand resting on the table unconsciously clinched as though it grasped the hilt of a sword. But she saw only the smile and not its meaning.

Gradually, she began under Brower's careful manœuvering, to go about among the tables. At first, her visits were very brief, but sometimes, some particular friend of the proprietor's detained her longer. On these occasions there was much laughter, jokes whose point she did not always see, and many rather rough compliments, but on the whole, nothing that offended her. Brower had seen to that. He knew

that the watchful eyes of the old pianist followed Marie about the room, and it suited his purpose to see that both his fears and hers should be laid to rest.

To the Captain's table, however, she was never invited. There was only the friendly nod in passing, the kindly smile that said, "I know; I understand how out of place you are here, how different you are from the rest!"

And old Schultz, seeing the flutter in the laces of the girl's breast when the Captain came in, watching the flush on her cheek, when their eyes met, noting too, with a pang in his heart, the evident disappointment when he failed to appear, shook his head sadly.

CHAPTER VI

Marie stood a moment at the door of her little dressing-room, before running the gauntlet between its shelter and the platform, where, through the wreaths of smoke, she could see old Schultz's thick shoulders hunched over the piano keys. Familiarity had not begotten any feeling of comfort or tolerance for the conditions of this cheap, tawdry place. She hated the timbered walls with the trite phrases stenciled on them in black letters, the bare tables with rings, left by many steins, indelibly stamped on them, the shrill-voiced women, the men. She hated it all. But one must live.

Her rent at the Schultz's must be paid. They had scarcely enough for themselves. Her thoughts reverted to the one pleasant memory, the tall officer who had intervened between her and the insults of Frau Brower.

She had been made painfully conscious of the woman's enmity, which was shown in a score of ways, and left her wondering what the next annoyance would be.

In a far corner, she suddenly caught a glimpse of the man of whom she had been thinking. He was engaged in earnest conversation with the proprietor. His face was black, his jaw angrily set, and he was emphatically pounding the palm of one hand with the fist of the other. Brower, unlike his usual truculent self, was listening in a meek, half-frightened way.

Who was this man, she wondered? What was he? Had he a permanent place in her life, or would he too, disappear into the darkness where so much that she had known had vanished?

She saw him turn from the door, and make his way to the table that was always reserved for him. She peered through the swinging smoke wreaths. Her eyes brightened as she watched him. His square, thin shoulders stooped a little as he took his seat, and in a moment he was in deep conversation with the same young lieutenant, who was always with him. His presence gave her a certain feeling of pleasure, though what it was, or why she felt it, it would have been difficult for her to define. She walked swiftly between the tables and mounted the platform.

After his courteous intervention in her behalf, she had reproached herself for the feeling of distrust that she had when she first saw him. The graying hair at his temples, increased her confidence, she could see it quite plainly from where she stood at the side of the piano. She found herself hoping that he would look in her direction, and was pleased when he turned from his companion and nodded cheerfully to her.

The pale-faced violinist whispered to her as she sorted her music.

"The Captain bows, Fräulein, that is nice, yes?"

She could not tell why she resented the tone, and gave no answer, but she was conscious of being disappointed when for a long time he paid no more attention to her. There were other beckoning fingers, however, other welcoming smiles, and Brower was always near to see that she was "nice to his friends,"

and being "nice to his friends" meant sometimes being obliged to sit at the tables and smiling at people she loathed. But no matter how her soul revolted at her task, she was always comforted when she could meet across the room, the brilliant eyes that held a smile for her, and seemed to say, "Never mind, I am here! And I am your friend!"

While he was there, she was sure of her songs being appreciated, for, although the Captain did not deign to applaud, Franz did and then curiously enough seemed to forget her.

The two men were always together. Sometimes they came in late, sometimes, they would be at their table when Marie arrived and would stay just long enough to hear one song. She noticed the deference the proprietor paid to them.

In some intangible way, the Captain managed to stamp himself upon her consciousness as her champion, unnoticeably to others, but plainly visible to the girl, whose horizon was so empty of anyone to whom she could turn for help or understanding. His methods were those of the man who understands women well enough to know that in order to achieve his ends, he must be as nearly as possible like the personality admired by the particular woman, in whom he is, for the moment, interested. But to Marie, sick of the coarse brutality about her, revolted by the covert insults that she only half understood, he seemed the personification of chivalry and thoughtfulness.

She was particularly grateful for his protection against the rough, boisterous men upon whom it was

part of her task to smile. Various little incidents in which he proved his wish to protect and befriend her, were treasured in her memory.

One night, the fat man, whose cascading chin had so revolted her the first time she sang, called her to his table, and afraid to disobey, lest Brower should be angry, Marie accepted his invitation.

"You're a nice little girl," he wheezed, putting his flabby hand with its flashing diamond, over hers. "We'll have a bottle of real wine together, not beer, like the rest of these," indicating with his thumb the drinking students. "You and I are going to be friends, and we're going to enjoy ourselves." He smelled horribly of beer and tobacco smoke, and Marie tried to draw her hand away, but he leaned heavily forward and tilted her chin up to him with a thick forefinger. "You're a little thin," he appraised, "but I like them like that!"

Marie drew away, frightened, when suddenly Brower tapped her tormentor on the shoulder.

"The Captain wants the Fräulein to sing another song before he goes. You will excuse her, yes?"

The fat man's face turned almost purple and he muttered an oath under his breath, but he drew back, and Marie, her heart rejoicing at the authority of her champion, hurried to the platform, smiling gratefully as she passed his table.

This might have been an accident, but it happened again and again. Each time some noisy student or boisterous young officer progressed too far in his attentions to her, Marie was sure of some subtle interference from the Captain that would put a stop to

the insults and unkindness which, without realizing why, she knew meant some terrible danger to her.

Gradually and almost imperceptibly, his strong mind and dominant personality took hold of her naturally clinging nature. He seemed so much older, that to her inexperience, it was as though her father were watching over her, and she gave him the gratitude and admiration a child might give.

Frequently, during the long days, as she bent over her sewing with Frau Schultz, his dark profile rose before her eyes, his quick smile flashed across her vision, and at night, when she brushed her yellow hair by the little window, trying to shake out in the faint breeze, the heavy scent of tobacco, which clung to it, she would remember gratefully how he had averted again some unpleasantness.

But no matter from what angle she viewed his attitude toward herself, she could find nothing that seemed to warrant the faintly indefinite sense of danger of which she was vaguely conscious, and which she tried to reason away.

One night, a greasy waiter came to the door of her dressing-room with a twisted tissue paper parcel in his hand.

"The Captain sends these, Fraulein," he mumbled, and shuffled off, leaving the parcel on a chair. Marie unfolded the wrappings and found two lovely roses, dewy and fragrant. She adored flowers. It was long since she had seen any excepting through the glass of some florist's window, and she pressed her flushed cheek against their cool petals. Her father had seldom gone for his feeble walk without bringing her

one or two blossoms on his return, and the memory brought the ready tears to her eyes.

How good this man was, she thought, as she pinned the flowers in among the white laces of her blouse. In every woman's heart there is the inherent desire for masculine admiration. Little convent-bred Marie was innocent of any thoughts of coquetry. She only felt the natural pleasure that youth does when it is noticed and appreciated.

Old Schultz shook his head when she showed him the two roses nestling against her breast, but there was no time for comment. The smile Marie sent toward the Captain's table, was a very bright one, and the young Lieutenant nudged his companion as he noticed it, but he was answered by so forbidding a frown, that he took refuge in his mug of beer.

Marie sang well that night. The clear, sweet voice held a note of joyousness, missing before. Deep in her heart, was the hope that the Captain might send the greasy waiter with a message asking her to step down to his table for a minute or so, but no message came, and to her disappointment, just after her first song, the Captain and his young friend pushed back their chairs and left.

Who was this man, she wondered, for the hundredth time. Everybody in the "Two Eagles," she had noticed, paid him marked deference. Once or twice before, she had seen him leave abruptly when some orderly had come in quietly and touched him on the shoulder. What was his place in this world of which she was beginning to see so many sides?

On the way home that night, old Schultz for the

first time, was cross. He only grumbled when Marie tried to talk about the roses she was so carefully guarding from the cold, under her coat. He growled something about no good coming from such things, but she scarcely heard him. Her feet tripped along, two steps to each of his, her heart full of gratitude for the kindness that had been shown her.

When she was in her own little room, she put the blossoms tenderly in one of the painted mugs that adorned her bureau, and began slipping quickly out of her white frock. As it fell about her feet in a soft, shapeless heap, Frau Schultz came in.

"Fräulein," she said, "Shatzi tells me that Captain Von Pfaffen gave you some flowers to-night."

Marie stepped out of her dress and hung it carefully in the clothes press.

Von Pfaffen, so that was his name!

"Yes," she smiled, "two lovely roses! Oh, Frau Schultz, that was just what my father used to do. Sometimes it was one lily, sometimes a spray of hyacinths, sometimes a rose. It made me think of my father!"

The blue eyes were moist and Frau Schultz kissed the girl tenderly as she bade her good-night.

"Shatzi," she told her husband later, as arrayed in carpet slippers and a tattered dressing-gown he sat smoking a good-night pipe, "Shatzi, there is no cause to worry, the girl is still only a child, she is grateful for something her father would have done for her. You must not suspect everybody!" and she vigorously pounded the already plump pillows of the mountainous connubial couch before climbing into it.

CHAPTER VII

Marie began to sing only for one table, for the one pair of ears for whose appreciation she cared. Love had not entered her thoughts, only a deep interest. This man was so unlike the others who frequented the "Two Eagles." His stern face that could break into a smile for her, the lines about his thin mouth, the graying hair, his straight military shoulders, all meant to the girl the protection she might have had from her father. She would have laughed had she known the thoughts that were worrying the good people with whom she lived.

The fact, however, that some one was interested in her, brought more color into her cheeks, more vivacity into her manner. She was developing, the lines of her figure were rounder. She was more mature. The promise of fair young womanhood was beginning to be fulfilled, so that now as she hurried along the short aisle between her dressing-room and the platform, more eyes followed her, more hands were stretched out to detain her. Brower was pleased with his investment.

One night she left the platform earlier than usual. The Captain and his companion had already gone, and she whispered to old Schultz that she would wait for him in her dressing-room. Once in the shelter of its dirty walls, she pinned on her hat, threw her cloak about her and sat down till the old man should be ready to come for her. She leaned her elbows on the

board which served as a dressing-table and looked at herself in the square of looking-glass that hung above it. It was cracked and splotched with mildew, and the light of the one gas jet flickered and marked queer shadows under her eyes and chin. But even so, she smiled at the pleasing image that smiled back at her.

The opening of the door startled her, and turning, she found herself facing Brower. The proprietor of the "Two Eagles" had never entered the little room before. Her heart sank. Was he coming to tell her she was not needed?

"What——" she began, but Brower stopped her.

"Don't get frightened, *Kleine*. I didn't come to tell you I thought I could get along without you." His voice was thick, and his coarse face redder than usual. He leered at her with his small, swinish eyes. She saw that he had been drinking heavily. "You're looking prettier these days, and I think I'll stretch a point and let you have an extra *krone* if you want it. Now, who says I'm not kind-hearted, eh? Come, little one, give me a kiss!" and before the girl quite realized what he was doing, he had grabbed her by the shoulders and planted a rough kiss on her cheek.

Marie screamed and pushed him from her with all her force.

"How dare you?" she gasped. "How dare you?"

Brower chuckled. "You're prettier when you're mad! Gott! I think I'll have another!" but as he started toward her, the girl struck him full in the face with her little clenched fist and ran from the room.

The indignity of it, the horrible feel of his flabby lips against her cheek, made her shudder as at the touch of some loathsome reptile. She ran sobbing through the passage, but just as she was about to open the door and go out into the street, a hand was laid on her arm.

She shrank back, shivering into the shadow, but as she turned, she found herself face to face with the Captain.

"Fräulein," he said, "what is wrong?"

Marie hid her face against his coat sleeve as a child might have done.

"He kissed me," she sobbed, "the awful creature!"

"Who?" his low voice shook with rage.

"Brower! I was waiting for Schultz to take me home, he came into the room and kissed me! It was horrible!"

Von Pfaffen started down the passage.

"I'll settle with him," he raged, but Marie caught at his hand.

"Please," she whispered frightened, "please!" and he turned and patted her shoulder.

"Very well," he said, "I'll see him later. Come, let me take you home," and with gentle fingers, he fastened her coat collar about her throat, and before Marie realized it, he had swept her into a *fiakre* and they were whirling away.

The thought of this man's kindness to her overwhelmed her again, and she huddled into her corner crying as though her heart would break.

"Come, Fräulein," urged her companion, "you really mustn't. I'll see that the brute is punished.

You mustn't cry so," and he put a protecting arm about her shoulders.

Marie sobbed against the rough cloth of his heavy military coat. All the sorrow and struggle, all the misery of the past months seemed to pour from her heart, but presently, mingled with the rumble of the wheels, she seemed to hear the query, "where are you going?"

She straightened herself suddenly and her companion made no effort to detain her.

"You haven't even asked me where I live," she said, surprise quieting her sobs. "Where are you taking me?"

Von Pfaffen drew her against his shoulder again.

"I knew you would tell me when you were calmer," he said. "In the meantime, it is early; we're here at my place. Come in for a minute. You are frightened and nervous. Come in, my old housekeeper will make you a cup of coffee, and by the time old Schultz reaches home, you'll be there too."

"Oh no," began Marie, "Frau Schultz will be worried, I can't," but the brakes were already jerking against the wheels and in another second the *fiakre* had drawn up in front of a brown-stone apartment house.

"I can't, they'll worry," and Marie drew back in the shelter of the cab as Von Pfaffen stepped onto the sidewalk and held out his hand to help her alight.

"Nonsense," he assured her, "I'll telephone the 'Two Eagles' as soon as we get in and have them tell Schultz. Come, Fräulein, just a cup of coffee."

His arm steadied her across the icy pavement, and

the warmth of the apartment hall was comforting, but Marie stepped into the lift with a beating heart.

Was this wrong, she asked herself? Would her father have approved? But the wonder of it all soon dulled the still small voice that spoke again of that vague sense of danger, and she entered the hallway as Von Pfaffen stood aside before the door he had just opened.

The girl looked about her curiously. So this was where he lived. It was a comfortable apartment, a peculiar mixture of severity and luxury. The great easy chair that held out inviting arms before a bright fire burning in the great *kachelofen*, and the long bare table with its litter of official-looking papers, contrasted curiously.

Von Pfaffen rang the bell and an old woman came in. Marie instinctively disliked her face, with its pendulous nose and the heavy blue-veined cheeks, but she seemed kindly and the girl was ashamed of her aversion.

"Coffee, Lena," ordered the Captain, and with a peculiar flat-footed shuffle, the old woman turned and left the room.

"She was my nurse when I was a child," said Von Pfaffen, and Marie looked after the ungainly form with a new interest.

"I—I'm ashamed to be giving you all this trouble," she stammered, as he helped her out of her coat; "but I couldn't stay there, could I?"

"Indeed you couldn't, child. Now you must forget all about it. I'm glad it was I who chanced to find

you before that beast could do you further harm. To-morrow I shall crush him like a fly!"

"You and the Schultzes are all the friends I have." She looked up at him gratefully. "There isn't anyone else in all the world."

Von Pfaffen took the little hand and patted it.

"There, there," he smiled, "three friends are a great many to have in this world, don't you think?" and he settled her comfortably into one of the big arm-chairs before the fire.

After a little, Lena waddled in, preceded by an appetizing aroma of coffee. She carried a tray on which she had set out a shining urn and a dish of cakes, and pushing aside the scattered papers on the littered table, she made room for her burden.

"Is everything well, Lena?" asked her master.

The old woman grunted and shuffled out, closing the door after her.

"She's not very friendly," apologized Von Pfaffen, "but she takes advantage of having been with me nearly all my life, and besides, she lends an air of respectability to my bachelor establishment."

Marie smiled because he did. It was good to be here in this handsomely furnished apartment, warm and cozy, and with this man, whom she so much admired, beside her. She sipped her coffee luxuriantly and nibbled one of the little cakes.

"I'll telephone that you're safe with me, Fräulein," he said, and rose and left the room.

Marie looked about her. How wonderful Fate was, she mused. If it hadn't been for that horrible Brower, she would not have been here now. The unwonted

warmth lulled her. The love of comfort and luxury was strong in her. Her father had catered to it. It had been his happiness to see how readily she had given up the austerity of the convent and revelled in the almost sybaritic ease with which he loved to surround her. She snuggled down into the embrace of the great easy chair with a sigh of content.

This was what her home had been like that short year with her father, and the thought of that and the intervening months with their bitter struggle, sent the slow tears down her cheeks again. She had not time to brush them away when her host entered.

"It's all right, Fräulein," he said. "Schultz came to the phone himself. I told him I'd bring you home later. What? You're not crying again? Fräulein, I call that unkind, when I'm trying to do all I can for you."

"I know you are," there was a catch in Marie's voice. "I'm not going to cry any more."

"That's right," and Von Pfaffen drew his chair up beside her.

"Now, let's have a talk. I've wanted to, ever since I first saw you at the 'Two Eagles.' "

"How wonderful that you should even have noticed me!" Marie was unconscious of any coquetry. It was wonderful to hear that this resplendent being should have picked her out for notice.

The Captain leaned over and took one of her hands in his.

"What a pretty little hand," he said. "What a pity it has had to work so hard. All these rough places," and suddenly he raised her fingers to his lips.

Marie was startled, but at her involuntary movement, he dropped her hand and turned again to the fire.

"Warm enough here?" he asked, so paternally, that the girl was ashamed of her vague fears. But somewhere in the distance she heard a clock striking the hour.

"It must be getting late, Herr Captain," she faltered, "I think I'd better go," and with a half sigh for the comfort about her, she rose to her feet.

The man rose, too, hastily, and put his hands on her shoulders.

"Just a little longer, Fräulein," he begged, "I've thought so often of you sitting here as you are now."

His face frightened Marie. The warmth of his hands burning through the shoulders of her thin gown made her uneasy. His eyes seemed bloodshot in the firelight, and a vein in his forehead suddenly stood out like a cord.

"Herr Captain, let me go," whispered the girl. "I must go."

"No!" His voice shook, "no, little one, you're here and you're mine," and before she really knew what was happening, she found herself crushed against his breast, powerless to struggle, a great dizziness sweeping over her. She seemed to lose all sense of everything excepting that from somewhere immeasurably above her, his mouth drew nearer, and nearer, till it folded over her own in a stifling kiss.

After what seemed an interminable time, consciousness came back to her, power to struggle, and with the strength of youth, she freed herself from his arms.

"Let me go," she panted, "let me go," and blindly she flung herself against the door that stood behind her. Where it led, she did not know, she only knew that she must get away, away from this man as she had run away from the other.

Slipping into the room beyond, she threw herself against the door, striving with desperate force to hold it against the man on the other side. She had only time to realize that she had flung herself into his bedroom for shelter, when the door yielded, and she cowered into a corner.

Von Pfaffen came toward her, his voice thick and unsteady. The vein in his forehead beating, his eyes, even away from the firelight, were bloodshot.

"Little one," he whispered, "you're not going to shut me out—to-night!"

CHAPTER VIII

The huntsman had successfully stalked the doe. With the ingenuity and skill of long experience he had brought her to bay. The trophy won, he had gone, leaving his victim suffering and alone, with a wound that time might heal, but a scar that could never be effaced.

When Marie roused herself from the stupor in which she had lain, the room was flooded with sunlight. She sat up slowly. Her head throbbed with a splitting pain, her eyeballs burned. She was sick with revolt and terror. This man, whom she had trusted, whom she had thought was her friend, was worse than those from whom he had seemed to protect her. One more veil was torn brutally away from her eyes, and the world stared back at her, gaunt, ugly, grim, and altogether pitiless. Phrases heard at the convent, kept repeating themselves over and over in her brain. What would her father have said could he have known? How could she explain her absence to the Schultzes? How could she face them again? That such a thing as this could have happened to her!

"I'll kill myself!" she sobbed. "I want to die!"

After awhile, old Lena shuffled in with breakfast on a tray, her ugly, wooden face, as expressionless as a carven image, her wicked old eyes shifting about the room. The girl buried her head deeper in the pillows.

"Let me alone!" she cried. "Let me alone! I want to die!"

The old woman grunted.

"Don't be a fool!" she said unsympathetically. "What did you come here for?" and setting the tray down, she left her to weep out her horror and remorse alone.

For a long time she lay convulsed with sobs. Then the natural reaction of youth and perfect health re-asserted itself. She gradually grew quiet. The courage that had made it possible for her to face so many trying experiences in the past year, came to her rescue.

The thing had happened. There was no going back. She must face it as best she could.

Later, her hat pinned on securely, her cloak wrapped about her, she opened the door and went into the library.

Von Pfaffen was sitting in the great easy chair by the fire, evidently waiting for her. He rose as she entered.

"Ah, little one——" he began, but stopped as he saw that she was dressed for the street.

Marie looked at him dully.

"I'm going!"

He laid a gentle hand on her shoulder and smiled into her eyes.

"Where?" The slight note of sarcasm did not escape her.

"I don't know," her voice was almost a whisper, her lips trembled pitifully.

He bent over her with a smile. His long arm drew her close to him.

"Sweetheart," he said softly, "don't be frightened. I love you. You are all mine now."

The girl tried to draw away from him, crying aloud her bitterness, but with the strength that she could not battle against, Von Pfaffen held her firmly against his shoulder.

"Little one," he whispered, "there is nothing to cry about. I love you! As soon as I can arrange my affairs, we'll be married. Everything will be well."

But Marie sobbed with long dry sobs that tore at her throat. How could she face the Schultzes? How could she go back to the "Two Eagles" even if they would take her in? Where was she to go? What was to become of her?

Von Pfaffen soothed and patted her.

"There is nothing to worry about, *Liebchen*," he whispered. "Don't you trust me?" His brilliant eyes softened into almost sincerity. "The Schultzes will probably not take you in, besides, your place is here with me."

Marie's breath caught in her throat and she shrank away from him.

"No," she stammered, "no—please! You must let me go!"

"But where?" and in her heart the girl echoed his words.

"Where!"

Quick to see his advantage, he put his hands on her shoulders.

"Now listen, I love you! I want you! As soon as

my affairs are adjusted, as soon as the work I'm engaged in is finished," and he pointed to the pile of papers on the long table, "you and I will be married!"

Her trembling hands grasped his coat lapels. She shook at them desperately.

"Marry me now," she begged, "marry me now! What would the nuns say—my father—Frau Schultz? Marry me now! You must!"

He drew her cheek against his own.

"Hush, little one," he whispered, "don't worry. There are reasons why I can't arrange things now. Everything will be all right. Can't you trust me?" His eyes smiled into hers, the lines about his mouth were softened, gentle. There was no suggestion of the terrible creature against whom she had tried to bar her door.

The power of his dominant personality over-awed her. She wanted so to trust him.

"But what am I to do?" she faltered. "Where am I to go?"

"You are not going anywhere. You are going to stay here with me, sheltered, taken care of, protected, as I shall protect you, until we can be married. You don't want to leave me, do you?" and in spite of her grief, the warning voice of her conscience, Marie thought of the "Two Eagles," of the swinging wreaths of tobacco smoke, the heavy, fetid air, the leers of the half-drunken students, which she seemed suddenly to understand. She felt again the flabby, sticky kiss of Brower against her cheek, and shuddered as she thought what that, too, might have meant. To go back to the "Two Eagles" was impos-

sible, even if Brower would have taken her, after the blow she had given him, and the Schultzes—the Schultzes would never let her in again. She looked about her half stupidly. The fire crackled comfortably in the stove. The room, in spite of its incongruity, was such a room as her father had taught her to love. This man beside her was, after all, one of her own class.

Through her thoughts, she could hear his voice saying again, softly, kindly, with that subtle charm that held such fascination for her: "You will stay, little one? You don't want to leave me, when I love you so! We'll be married as soon as I can arrange it. Trust me. Little hands like these were never meant to work. Little feet like these should be cased in satin. Let me give you everything, anything! Sweetheart, sweetheart, you don't want to leave me! You can't!"

CHAPTER IX

The days that followed were like a dream to Marie. At first there were tears and misgivings. Wonderment at what the Schultzes were thinking of her staying away so long, racked her with remorse and suffering, but Von Pfaffen quieted her fears, assured her over and over of marriage as soon as his affairs could be arranged, as soon as the work in which he was engaged, should be finished.

There was nowhere to go, nothing to do. She had no money, and so miserably, she stayed on, hoping as each day came, that it would bring the marriage he was promising.

Sometimes she would look at the pile of papers on the littered table and plead with him not to wait till they were finished. Those piles of papers seemed interminable. Her training, her mentality, all her instincts told her, that after what had happened, she was eternally damned unless he married her, and it was that hope which kept her spirit alive. She lived from day to day waiting for this salvation. When he made his work, as he always did, his excuse, she would look up into his eyes and resolve to wait.

He had set her mind at rest as to what the Schultzes would say, by telling her that they knew where she was, that he had told them he had engaged her as his secretary.

"Isn't that a better position for you, than teaching

stupid children or singing in a smoky café?" he asked.

He had sent old Lena away to visit her people, and given over his keys and the care of his rooms to Marie. In spite of the thought of whether the convent and her father would have approved of the state of affairs, while waiting for the marriage, her fears were gradually lulled and little by little, she came to take things almost as a matter of course.

She had wanted to go back to her room at the Schultzes for her few belongings. The only clothes she had were her little white dress and the coat which she had worn the night they came here from the "Two Eagles." But Von Pfaffen had laughed.

"Never mind those few rags, *Liebchen*," he said, "come with me and we'll get some more."

Marie had demurred at this, but he insisted.

"As my future wife, you owe it to me to look as pretty as you can! When I introduce you to my friends, you want me to be proud of you, don't you?"

Reluctantly Marie had come to agree that perhaps after all, this was right, that she could accept these things almost as a marriage gift. Surely it meant that she could trust him. She resolved, however, to select only what was absolutely necessary.

But her eyes sparkled over the lovely clothes which were the result of this decision, for although she had chosen only plain things, Von Pfaffen had insisted on adding one or two dainty dresses from which she had resolutely turned away.

Marie was in that state of her development, where absolute dependence upon other people was a neces-

sity. She had clung to the Schultzes as she now clung to the belief and hope that this man would, in the end, exonerate her in the eyes of her conscience.

The chasm had been crossed, the bridge had been burned. She knew desperately that her only salvation was to cling to the position in which she found herself, she must go on in the hope that soon the wrong that had been done her might be righted.

Sometimes when he was away on this mysterious business of his, she used to sit and brood for hours, either staring into the fire or out of the window, never really seeing anything. She longed so for some one to confide in, some one to advise her. She thought of the good priest at the convent, who used to smile and pat her head after confession. If she could only have gone to him and asked his advice. But Von Pfaffen always laughed when she spoke of going to church, and as for confession, he had absolutely forbidden her that. After each one of these days of brooding, Marie would go to him when he returned home and ask again when they were to be married.

Sometimes he used to laugh as he lifted her chin with a long forefinger.

"What a little doubter!" he would say. "Come, come, have patience, all in good time!" and then he would so adroitly change the conversation that she found herself thinking of other things in spite of herself. Sometimes he would be pleased to take her seriously.

"Marie," he would say, looking deep into her eyes with his magnetically brilliant ones, "you are the same to me as my wife now; do you think a few words

spoken by a priest will make me feel any differently? I'm afraid you don't love me, or you wouldn't doubt me!"

There was nothing for it, but resignation. If he said things were all right, they must be. If he said things would adjust themselves, they surely would. She must be content to wait.

Gradually, she came to learn that this man who had so cavalierly linked his life with hers, and who posed before the world as an indolent gentleman of leisure with no other vocation than his military duties, which, however, never seemed to take him to the barracks, had a secret engrossing occupation. Private matters, from the knowledge of which she was sternly shut out, occupied his constant attention and often took him away for long periods. At such times he gave her no knowledge of his destination or when he would return.

At first she felt strange, alone in the quiet apartment, but she grew accustomed to these journeys of his and to the sudden sound of his key in the door, for he would come back as quietly and with as little intimation as he had gone.

There were callers at all sorts of queer hours, men in uniform and men muffled in great coats with hats pulled down over their eyes, and always when they came, he would manage so that she would either go to her room or would remember some little shopping she had to do.

Once she had been awakened in the night by voices. She opened her door softly and looked out. Von Pfaffen and five men were seated about the dining-

table. They were drinking, their faces were flushed, their manner excited. She heard one of them ask,

"Are you sure it will come?"

To which the eldest man in the party, a burly, square-jawed officer of high rank, replied with an oath:

"It must come!"

She saw Von Pfaffen rise to his feet and lift his wine glass.

"Here's to the Day!" he said.

The others rose also, and rang their glasses together.

"To the Day!"

She closed her door quietly. What did it mean? What was the day for which they were waiting.

In the evenings that followed she heard this toast again and again, and each time it stirred in her a vague dread of some impending evil.

Once she had had a glimpse of one of these visitors who evidently desired that his identity should not be disclosed. In the dim light, the face seemed strangely familiar.

The Captain's manner as he led his guest to the door was full of a servility she had never known him to show to any one, but while she was still wondering, the visitor caught sight of her and drew his coat collar hastily up over his face. Von Pfaffen turned angrily and slammed the door. She spent a long time puzzling as to where she had seen these features before. It seemed to her that they had been depicted in many photographs, but who he was she could not remember.

When she mentioned this incident later, Von Pfaffen told her unceremoniously to hold her tongue, though afterward, he made up to her with extra caresses for his rudeness.

Once she had overheard a word, a sudden phrase, that, though she was unable to quite understand its meaning, still filled her with breathless dread, a vague apprehension of this engrossing work of his.

One evening when they were alone, Marie spread a dainty little supper on the long table, pushing aside the scattered papers with a careless hand to make room for the tempting dishes. There had been a bottle of Tokay and he was flushed with the glow of its contents, but there was a suppressed exultation in his manner which she could not altogether attribute to the wine he had drunk. She had never seen him quite like this, he was always so much master of himself. She felt instinctively the force of some great underlying excitement that was gripping him.

"Little one," he bragged thickly, "some day you and I will have everything we can wish for. Some day soon, we will stand by and watch all the world rock—and when it settles down again, there will be only one country—the Fatherland!"

She was startled at the expression that came over his face. It glowed with ruthless greed, the will to dominate, to succeed, no matter what the cost.

"How strangely you talk!" she said. "What a wild dream!"

"Dream! *Herrgott!* It's no dream! It's the truth!" and he brought his fist down on the table so that the empty glasses danced. Then he suddenly

turned quiet, sullen, and after vainly trying to bring him back to his gay mood again, Marie gathered the remains of the little feast and left the room.

Sometimes they conversed in French when they were together. The Captain spoke it flawlessly, without a trace of the German guttural, and often he would amuse the girl by imitating Parisian street gamins or French market women. He was an excellent mimic and Marie was secretly amazed at his ability to change his personality at will. It seemed so incongruous with the severe dignity of his character as she knew it.

He always spoke to her as though to a child he was trying to amuse, but as she listened, Marie was conscious of an indefinable apprehension, a vague fear of this man whom she could so little understand.

During the long, monotonous days when she was alone, she turned for solace and company to the books which lined his room. A new world was opened up for her of which she had never dreamed. She spent long hours pouring over Schopenhauer, Kant, Nietzsche, and even some of the Russian writers, Tolstoi, Gorky, Dostoieffsky. She began to see the answers to some of her own problems through the bitter eyes of these great Sad Ones.

One dull, cold day, when Von Pfaffen had been away longer than usual, she curled herself up in the great chair by the fire with a volume of Dostoieffsky's "Letters from the Underworld." It was one of those wild March days, whose fierceness proclaims it as the last gasp of winter, and the glow of the coals was very cheering.

She turned to the story, "*Apropos of Falling Sleet.*" The title seemed appropriate for the day, and was in sharp contrast to the comfort of the fire.

But as she read through the bitter, stinging tirade which is poured out on the head of a poor little Petrograd prostitute, a tirade etched with the biting acid of the great Russian's most caustic pen, her face whitened, her lips trembled, the horror of it shook her with a dreadful fear. This first knowledge, that because men were brutal animals there must be women whose lot it was to suffer so, widened her eyes with a terror like a child must feel in a nightmare. She threw the book away from her and tried to forget it by looking over the scattered papers on the table. They proved uninteresting and unintelligible to her, and so with characteristic neatness, she arranged them in methodical piles. Von Pfaffen, entering in his usual unexpected manner, observed her occupation and was furiously angry with her, so angry that she was frightened. The pages of the book she had read, still clear in her mind, she burst into hysterical weeping.

His anger, however, was short-lived.

"Never mind," he said, "it's of no matter, but remember you are never to go near my papers again"; and Marie, grateful that the storm had blown over, dried her eyes, promising faithfully.

She had thought many times of going to see the Schultzes, but always there was something to prevent. She did send them a letter enclosing a bank note, and telling them that she was well and that soon she and the Captain were to be married, but the letter had

come back unopened and she had concluded that for some reason they had given up the little flat and gone elsewhere.

Once she had timidly mentioned the Russian book to Von Pfaffen, but he had taken it from her clinging fingers and said that such books were not for pretty heads like hers to worry over.

Occasionally he took her to the theatre or the opera. She was in the midst of a world she had never known, filled with the color and life of Vienna, the sight of beautiful women in wonderful clothes, of sparkle, light. It was as though she were living in a different sphere. But his business engrossed him more and more as the days went by, and to Marie, his waning interest merely meant that these mysterious affairs of which she knew nothing, were taking up his entire attention.

One day Franz, the young Lieutenant, who had been her first sponsor at the "Two Eagles," walked in and found her busy about the place, a dainty little apron tied over her pretty morning frock, her yellow hair braided neatly about her small head. This was the first time he had seen her since those nights at the "Two Eagles." He stood and looked at her with mouth and eyes open.

"Ach," he said, "so?"

Marie's answer had been filled with dignity. There was something about this heavy-faced boy she always resented.

"I am the Captain's secretary," she said hastily, and then added as she saw the flat face broaden in an understanding grin, "the Captain and I are to

be married as soon as all this work is finished," and she waved a small hand toward the table.

The grin on the Lieutenant's face grew into a laugh.

"Married?" he chuckled. "Married! That's good! I congratulate you, Fräulein," and gathering the papers he had come for, he turned on his heel and left.

Marie could hear his noisy chuckle above the sound of his clicking boot heels, as he hurried down the passage.

She was furiously angry at something she had seen in his eyes. His coarse laugh hurt her. All her old doubts, which Von Pfaffen's suave manner had managed to lull, came surging back. This stupid young Lieutenant, he, too, suspected what old Lena had hinted at. She threw herself on the couch and wept in an agony of bitterness and shame.

When Von Pfaffen came in, she ran to him with the tears still wet on her flushed cheeks and clung to him desperately.

"You *are* going to marry me, aren't you?" she sobbed.

"Of course, we'll be married," he assured her, "of course, but we must wait. When this pressing work is finished, everything will be as you wish!"

CHAPTER X

And so the days flew by bringing little change, excepting that Marie was left more and more to herself as Von Pfaffen's work seemed to accumulate.

She seldom touched the piano when he was near, for although she played well, she lacked the roundness of touch, the depth of tone which pleased his fastidious ear. But during the long hours when he was away, her music was a great solace to her.

Her walks never carried her far from the neighborhood, and brought her little amusement. It was a peculiarly quiet, uneventful location, given over, for the most part, to nurses and their charges.

Von Pfaffen was away from the apartment now for longer periods of time. These journeys came at more and more frequent intervals. His manner toward her began to change, he grew brusque and indifferent, the slightest thing irritated him. He would sit for long periods at the littered table, going over his papers in silence. Fearful of annoying him, she would remain quiet, crocheting endless yards of lace or staring into the coals, and when he had finished his work, he would gather it together, put on his hat and coat and leave her without a word.

Once during his absence, she had ventured another glimpse at those papers which so absorbed him, but they seemed to be mostly tracings of curious lines, columns of cryptic numbers and telegrams in what appeared to be a cypher, and she soon lost all interest as to what might be their import.

Toward spring, old Lena walked in one morning, her pendulous nose red from the brisk winds, her ample form swathed in the enveloping folds of an ancient shawl.

"So you're still here, Fräulein?" was her ungracious greeting, and Marie, who had welcomed her with a smile, was chilled.

"Of course, I'm still here, Lena," she answered, as the old woman laid aside her wraps. "I'm to stay here. The Herr Captain and I are to be married soon."

The old woman looked at her curiously from between her reddish eyelids.

"So," she grunted, "that's what he told you. Well, it's not for me to say," and she ran an inquisitive forefinger along the ledge of the mantle in search of dust.

Marie was angry, but it had been so long since she had spoken with anyone besides the Captain, that she welcomed the return of even this unpleasant creature.

"Lena," she began, "you know the Captain so well, you must know that he always does what he says he will do. Won't you be a little kind to me? I'm a very lonely girl."

The old woman smoothed her scanty hair, which she wore according to an ancient fashion, banded down on either side of her face and rolled under her ears into a hard little knot behind.

"Well, Fräulein," she said grudgingly, "you may be different from the 'others,' I don't know," and that was all the conversation Marie could get from

her for the rest of the day, although she followed the old woman about the little apartment as she grumblingly set things back in the order in which she was accustomed to having them, out of which Marie had changed them.

The girl tried to talk to Von Pfaffen that night, but it was very late when he came in and his mood was such as to discourage any effort to continue the conversation, and so she lay awake almost till dawn, worrying. She had been afraid to face this question boldly, even to herself. After his first promises, she believed him because she wanted to believe him, because her peace of mind depended upon it. In the books she had read before she came here, wedding bells always ended the last chapter, journeys always ended in lovers' meeting. But the Captain's books were different. There was that horrible chapter of Dostoieffsky, which she had since read again, and every now and then an unpleasant picture had crossed her mind, of one of the convent girls who had come back weeping to the Mother Superior, and when she allowed herself the memory, she could even now hear the stern voice saying: "My child, you have sinned deeply!"

But Von Pfaffen's kindness, his repeated assurances, at first had shut out all fear of this. Now, however, things looked different, his manner had changed. Old Lena's allusion to those "others," disquieted her.

She thought of the letter that had come back unopened from the Schultzes. She recalled that the address had been crossed out and her own substituted

in which she now remembered to resemble Von Pfaffen's handwriting, a fact which had made no impression on her mind at the time.

She lay watching the square of the window grow gray with the morning light. This couldn't come to her, she thought; he had promised. But supposing it were true? What would she do?

She fell asleep at last with the sound of his words in her ears, "Don't you trust me?"

But it was young Franz who added the last straw to her endurance. He came hurrying in one morning several days later to get a portfolio the Captain wanted.

"Good morning, Fräulein," was the young man's greeting as old Lena let him into the living-room, "it's nice and cozy here, I wish I could stay."

Marie pushed one of the big chairs nearer the stove.

"Why not sit down awhile," she smiled.

Usually her manner with him had repelled any advances, but to-day she wanted to talk to some one, anyone, even this flat-faced boy.

Franz (Marie had never learned his last name), sank stiffiy into the cushions of the great chair, his hands with their thick fingers spread out on each knee, the toes of his shiny boots turned toward one another, round, pale blue eyes staring fatuously into her face.

"You are very pretty, Fräulein," he began, but Marie interrupted him.

"Don't compliment me, Herr Lieutenant. I want to talk to you if you have a few minutes to spare."

He leaned toward her with a smile that was meant to be ingratiating.

"Indeed yes, Fräulein," he said and cleared his throat. "Indeed yes! My time is at the disposal of so beautiful a young lady."

His manner was such a ludicrous imitation of the suave tones of his chief that Marie almost laughed in his face, but she controlled the impulse and went straight to the heart of her question.

"Tell me, when will all this be finished?" her glance took in not only the littered table, but the yellow portfolio resting at the side of his chair.

"That I do not know, Fräulein. Why do you ask?"

"Because, I am waiting for that, for then the Captain and I are to be married."

The boy threw back his head and laughed.

"Ach, Fräulein, you will have a long, long wait!"

"What makes you say that?" Marie was her own inquisitor now.

"Because," and the boy rose awkwardly, shaking down the tight blue legs of his uniform, "because the Herr Captain's work is never finished."

"Do you mean——?" Marie was on her feet now, the scales were falling fast from her eyes.

He put a clumsy hand on her arm.

"Come Fräulein, you're too pretty to worry," he said. "If the Herr Captain grows too busy, there's always me."

The blood rushed into Marie's face and receded quickly again, leaving her very lips white.

"I think you had better go," she said, and there

was that in her manner that made the Lieutenant, after one look into her eyes, turn on his heel and leave the room, closing the door after him with a click.

Marie stood for a long time motionless, unseeing. They were right, Franz and Lena. She had been a fool, but she would give him one more chance. She would put the question to him unfalteringly when he came in. She dragged herself over to the window seat and sat looking down into the square. Her hands clasped and unclasped nervously, her teeth tore at her underlip. She made up her mind she would sit there and watch for him, no matter how long it would be before he came. With dry eyes, she stared down into the deserted street, for even the nurse maids and their charges were absent.

It was one of those windy spring days when the breath of winter still lingers in the air and sends the dust whirling in eddies about the street and around corners. The clouds hung low, and every now and then, a splash of rain moistened the pavement.

Two women were coming toward each other, their skirts blowing against their limbs and outlining them like Greek statues. The one as she came against the wind, held her head low to guard her hat, her white stockings showing above her shoe tops as her skirts ballooned behind her. The other leaned against the gale and almost ran with funny little hurried steps, as the wind pushed her before it, one hand hanging onto her hat, the other trying to steady her flying skirts.

They met, passed, and left the street once more to the wind, the dust eddies and scattered pieces of

paper which danced and skittered along the pavement.

Lena came in after awhile to find out if Marie would have some lunch, but the girl paid no heed to her question, and the old woman shuffled out again, crossly.

The fire died down, the burnt coals clicking as they fell through the grate into the graying pile of ashes. The little clock on the mantel struck the hour, the half hour, and again the hour, but Marie sat as she had sat since the Lieutenant left her.

Everything Von Pfaffen had ever said came back to her clearly, stripped of all the glamor, all the fascination, all the hope that had held her these many weeks. She remembered things he had told her that were deliberate lies, lies so cunningly worded that she had never been able quite to accuse him of them. She found herself facing the fact, that almost every statement he had made to her, though made with the positive manner of assurance, and with every semblance of truth, had been utterly false. She was conscious of a great growing anger, a fierce glow of hatred, resentment. Her eyes narrowed, her lips tightened. Once for all, she would know the truth.

Several times the telephone bell shrilled out, but she paid no heed, and then at last a huge chocolate-colored car turned the corner and drew up at the curb. The chauffeur jumped down and threw open the door. Marie flattened her face against the windowpane.

After a second, the Captain stepped onto the pavement and a slender, white-gloved hand in a handsome

sable cuff, was held out. He bowed over it, and turning on his heel entered the apartment house. The chauffeur closed the door and with a purr, the car drew away from the curb and went on its way.

Marie waited to hear Von Pfaffen's key in the lock, her heart pounding. No matter what his mood, she must know her fate now. The Lieutenant's laugh and Lena's phrase about the "others" were ringing in her ears.

He came in hurriedly and threw his hat and heavy fur-lined coat on a chair.

"Well, Marie," he said brusquely, "I have only a few seconds. Will you ring for Lena to bring some coffee?"

She came and stood beside him where he sat at the table rummaging among the litter.

"I must speak with you," she said, "there is something I must know."

"I am busy now," he did not raise his eyes from the papers.

"When are we going to be married?"

The Captain let his thin hand rest a moment on the edge of the table.

"Are you worrying about that again?" he asked, looking up at her with a frown. "Haven't I told you as soon as my work is finished?"

"Your work will never be finished!" Marie was echoing the Lieutenant's words in almost the Lieutenant's stolid tone.

Von Pfaffen's face darkened.

"You're nagging again," he said. "I have too much to think about to be bothered about trifles. If

you are not satisfied here, I have no doubt the Schultzes will take you in again."

Marie drew in her breath sharply. They were right, and she had believed him. She seized him fiercely by the coat sleeve.

"You lied to me!" she cried. "You lied! You never meant to marry me! You lied to me!" and with all her strength, she shook at his arm as a small terrier might shake at the shaggy coat of a mastiff.

Von Pfaffen turned and held her from him.

"I marry you?" he sneered, "a cabaret singer!"

Marie's mouth was dry, the little pulse in her throat pounded as though it would burst. She drew back her hand and struck Von Pfaffen straight across the face.

He rose to his feet with an oath, his cheek a dull red, excepting where the mark of her blow showed livid.

"You little devil," he said between his teeth. "What do you think you could ever be in the life of a man like me? You want the truth? Well, I'll give it to you. You amused me, filled in long hours, when my nerves were ready to snap. Did you think for a second that a woman like you could hold me? I thought even you had more brains than really to believe that! I've given you comfort, I've taken care of you, I've given you much more than—if I must speak plainly—you have really been worth. There are things of so much more moment in my life that even this explanation is taking valuable time; but I've this to thank you for, you have helped me tell

you what I've been meaning to, that as soon as you care to, you are at liberty to go!"

He turned away from the flood of tears he expected to follow his words, but the girl only stood staring at him, terrified.

Her mind was waking slowly to another phase of the world of which she had never dreamed. Unconsciously, the flower of her life was opening, developing, and the development was agony. She had learned grief with the loss of her father, poverty and the struggle for existence in that bitter year, and now this!

She turned with a dry sob and stumbled into her room, shutting and locking the door after her. She must think. She must reason out what to do. Shame, horrible, scourging shame, swept over her. She threw herself in a shuddering heap across the counterpane of her bed.

Spent with the grief and anguish that had followed her awakening, she lay for a long while dully repeating over and over the phrase, "he lied to me!" Presently this gave place to resentment, bitter hatred, which dried her tears. Her mind was swept of all illusions, she saw things clearly as they were. Once more she faced a crisis, and swiftly she made her decision as to what course she must follow. She sat up listening for the sounds that would tell of Von Pfaffen's departure.

She heard him rattle the poker among the dead coals, then old Lena shuffle in and set down the coffee tray, his rough dismissal of her and the old woman's angry grunt. The telephone rang and she heard the

click of china, as he hastily set down his cup and went to answer it. She heard him say, "yes, immediately, I'll take a cab, good-bye," and her imagination followed him as he hung up the receiver and shrugged himself into his great coat, and with the sound of the closing door, she jumped to her feet.

Hastily she rummaged in her bureau drawer. There were two or three bank notes and some gold, besides some small change, housekeeping money. These she stuffed into her purse, they would stand between her and starvation for a little while at least. She took her suit and hat from the clothes press, and slipping off her blue gown, let it lie on the floor where it fell. She kicked off the little satin bedroom slippers and pulled on her shoes.

Once in her clothes, she brought out her small leather traveling case, and regardless of neatness or precision, she tumbled in the necessary things. She hesitated over the few jewels Von Pfaffen had given her, with the thought that they might aid her in escaping. She decided, however, to leave them and placed them where they could easily be seen on her dressing-table. Then, carefully, she locked and strapped the bag.

Her hat was pinned securely, she fastened the collar of her coat, and with a last look about, she picked up her bag and left the house. But it was not until she felt the cold air of the outside world whipping against her cheeks, that she realized that she had nowhere to go.

CHAPTER XI

THERE was a trolley line along the end of the street where Von Pfaffen lived, and almost without her own volition, Marie found herself making toward it. She boarded the first tram that came along, regardless of the direction. She paid her fare and sat staring ahead of her. What was to become of her? Across the way, a fat market woman sat mumbling her gums. Marie found herself watching the huge, uncorseted figure, quivering with the motion of the car.

At each corner, the tram stopped and people kept getting on and off, continually passing between Marie and the old woman who dozed and woke every once in a while, with a start.

"I'll get off where she does," thought the girl. "I'll leave it to Fate."

After what seemed an interminable time, the old woman pulled herself up with a jerk, gathered her basket and various other bundles and waddled out of the car. Marie jumped to her feet and stumbled after her. She stood and watched the ungainly figure till it disappeared round a corner, then she looked about to see where she was. The houses seemed strangely familiar, and suddenly, she realized that she was near the little flat where she had lived with the Schultzes. Fate was kind.

It was almost with joy that she started toward what had been her home. True, her letters had been

unanswered, sent back unopened, but kind Frau Schultz and the old man would surely not turn her away, when she told them everything.

With a beating heart, she climbed the stair. On the second landing, a slatternly old woman put her head out of a door.

"Who are you looking for, Fräulein?" she asked, in a hoarse voice.

Marie told her.

"They're not here any more," croaked the creature. "The old man's dead, he had a stroke or something; the old woman's gone, I don't know where."

Marie choked and staggered back against the wall. Her only friends in all the city—one of them dead, the other vanished.

As the door slammed, the girl started blindly down the stairs. An old Bible lesson came into her mind: "*The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.*"

She was alone, absolutely alone in this great city, with no one to whom she could go for help. She walked up the street aimlessly, slowly, her lips murmuring over and over: "What shall I do? What shall I do?"

On the corner she stopped. She realized she must collect her scattered thoughts, she must form some plan. It was growing late, here and there the street lights were beginning to flicker.

Presently two men came toward her. She watched them as they drew near, half conscious of what she was doing. One was a dark, heavy-set man who wore

a plaid traveling coat and carried a shabby valise. The other was younger, quite thin and stoop-shouldered, his hat pulled down over his eyes. As they passed her, Marie heard the thin man say:

"You will arrive at the *Gare du Nord, mein Herr.* I'm sure they will be there to meet you. Parisians are notably hospitable."

"We must hurry, or we'll miss the train," rumbled the other in a deep voice and they swung into a brisker walk as they passed Marie.

Like a flash she had the answer to her question. In Paris, lived the only relatives she had in the world, some distant cousins of her mother's. She remembered that once her father had brought one of them to the convent to see her. She remembered the kindly sparkle in his eyes, as he playfully pinched her cheek and told her that some day when she was grown, she must come to visit them. They had sent her a letter of sympathy on the occasion of her father's death. She would go to Paris.

She had half forgotten their address, but she would try to remember it on the train. Turning, she almost ran after the two men on their way to the railroad station.

At the ticket office, she emptied her purse. There was very little left when she had paid her fare, but it was with a sense of relief that Marie followed the porter as he went toward the train with her bag. She had taken a second-class ticket and he thrust her into a compartment, holding out a dirty hand for his tip. There was scarcely time to pay him his few *hellers*, when the train began to move, and with a

gasp she realized that she was starting out into an absolutely unknown world, with almost nothing in her purse between herself and starvation.

The compartment was empty. She took off her hat and tried to make herself as comfortable as she could for the long journey and, as the train came to full speed and they left the city behind, she stared out into the darkness.

She tried to remember where this cousin she was setting out to find, lived. His name was Le Grand—Jules Le Grand—the address was—the address was—and Marie, exhausted by the bitter disappointments of the day was sound asleep.

Toward midnight, she awoke. Pain, humiliation, anxiety, returned. The dim emptiness of the swaying railway carriage seemed to symbolize her own life. She was so utterly helpless, so absolutely alone, being carried on swiftly by a force over which she had no control.

She tried to remember the Paris address as she sat and stared at the lamp in the ceiling, swinging with the motion of the train.

"Avenue—Avenue——" she kept repeating, when suddenly it came to her. "Avenue Victor Hugo, Number Five *Bis!*"

She almost cried aloud with joy. Paris was no longer a desert to her. There was such a place as the Avenue Victor Hugo, Number Five *Bis*—there was such a person as Monsieur Jules Le Grand. There was some one in the world to whom she could go, and Vienna, Von Pfaffen and all the months she had spent with him, that chapter was closed, finished forever.

She dug her nails in her palms.

"I'm going to bury it all," she whispered to herself. "I'm going to bury it deep. None of it ever happened. I'm going to be born again the day I reach Paris."

Early in the morning the train rumbled into the station at Munich, and a fat guard snapped open the door of her compartment, shouting:

"*Aus steigen! München!*"

She gathered her wraps and the little bag and followed the ungainly porter to where the Paris train was waiting at the far end of the platform.

This time the compartment was almost filled.

Two English women were already settled for the long journey, each deeply immersed in a small red guide-book. In one corner, a smart little Viennese with penciled eyebrows and reddened lips, smiled to herself as she looked out of the window. The other two corners were also filled. One, by a heavy, overdressed Jewess. The other, piled with the luggage of the two English women. Marie had not the temerity to ask them to remove it, so she sat silently in the small space allotted her.

The train began to jolt and slowly pulled out of the station, gathering speed, till finally it swung clear of the houses of Munich and out into the country.

It was a drizzly cold day, with a leaden sky, and the landscape, as they flew by, looked cheerless and sodden.

From the pile of luggage, the English women extracted a tea-basket and prepared to make tea. One of them offered Marie a cup.

She refused it with a shake of her head and a murmured, "Thank you."

The little Viennese began humming to herself. She was munching some cakes out of a paper bag, and the crumbs kept falling on her lap. She brushed them away with a none-too-clean hand.

"It's a long journey!" said the fat Jewess.

The little Viennese smiled.

"Sometimes long journeys have happy endings," she said.

The two English women were talking to each other in low voices.

Marie only knew a few words of their language, and she listened half curiously to the sharp, sibilant sounds as the women evidently discussed the places mentioned in their guide-books.

What a strange language English was, she thought, every other word seeming to end with a sharp hiss.

The fat Jewess, encouraged by the smile of the little Viennese, began a voluble one-sided conversation.

Marie watched the lamp above her head sway back and forth. As the trees and villages flew past, each one bringing her nearer this great unknown city, she wondered if there might be a possibility of her finding happiness there.

She became aware that the two English women were discussing her, their eyes taking in the details of her costume. It made her uncomfortable. She wondered if there was anything about her appearance that was in the least indicative of what she had been through.

The long day wore on, in fitful conversation, brief, uneasy snatches of sleep, weary watching of the flying landscape.

As the light died, the two English women settled themselves for the night and were soon asleep, their mouths open in unlovely abandon. The fat Jewess ostentatiously turned her rings with the stones inside her hands and sank into a noisy slumber. Marie leaned her head back wearily against the dusty red velvet cushions, and closed her eyes, but the sleep she so longed for as a blessed respite from her thoughts, would not come.

Toward midnight, she sat up with the sudden stopping of the train, as did the other occupants of the compartment. They were crossing the border and the custom officers were going through the luggage.

"Sugar? Chocolate? Matches? Cigars?" she heard them say, as one by one the bags were sleepily opened and gone through, sleepily locked and strapped again, and a sticky stamp pasted on the outside. Then the door was slammed and locked and they all settled down once more to slumber, but to Marie, sleep would not come.

The train sped on and as the morning broke, the others began to stir. The two English women made their toilets with the aid of a handsome leather dressing-case. The little Viennese sat up and reddened her lips with a tiny lipstick, and fluffed her hair. This done, from somewhere in her small bag she brought out a paper bag filled with food and began munching it, happily smiling to herself as she stared out of the window. The fat Jewess awoke with a yawn.

"Where are we?" she asked in guttural German, but as nobody answered, she busied herself turning her rings right side out, and smoothing her carefully dressed hair with the palms of her plump white hands.

Day had arrived.

Marie listlessly watched them preen themselves. She gave a cursory pat to her own hair, a cursory straightening to her collar. She sat up very straight. Her head twisted to see the flying landscape. Her cheeks were flushed with excitement, but under her eyes lay violet shadows. Her lips trembled like a child's about to cry. She was frightened again, now that she was nearing Paris. What was she going to find there? Suppose, after all, the address she remembered was wrong? Suppose Monsieur Le Grand had moved? With thoughts like this, she tortured herself. She blinked back the tears and bit her lips. She must not break down now.

After what seemed centuries, the train rumbled into the dark cavern of the *Gare du Nord.* The English women stuck their heads out of the window, calling:

"*Portier! Portier!*"

The little Viennese gathered her small belongings. As the train came to a standstill, and the guard opened the door, she was out like a flash, and Marie saw her running with a happy laugh into a pair of masculine arms held out to her.

The English women loaded a thin porter with their luggage which almost hid him from view, and sedately followed him along the platform.

The fat Jewess slowly gathered her valises and packages and stood blocking the doorway while she

bargained with the porter. Coming at last to an agreement, she stepped heavily down and waddled after him.

Marie, in the shadow of the deserted compartment, waited, too frightened to move. The platform was a babel of voices, shrieking porters, scolding guards, trunks going this way and that, people jostling each other as they came and went.

At last a porter thrust his head in at the door.

"Mademoiselle," he asked, "are you staying here always?"

She was trembling as she stepped onto the platform, and the man eyed her curiously.

"Taxi?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," gasped Marie, "of course."

She followed him through the maze, and handed her ticket to the gate-keeper. As she stood on the steps of the great station, waiting till the man should have found her a cab, a sense of utter desolation came over her. Paris, gay, wonderful, laughing Paris, lay before her, but to the girl, it seemed as though she were staring into Chaos itself.

CHAPTER XII

The taxi rolled along the Champs Elysées and finally, turned into the Avenue Victor Hugo and stopped at Number Five *Bis*.

"Behold, we have arrived, Mademoiselle," smiled the driver genially, as he turned about and looked down at her from his seat.

Marie rose hurriedly and stepped to the street. As she opened her purse to pay the man, she suddenly realized that she had nothing but Austrian money.

"I have no French money. Will you—can you take this?" and she held out a small handful of *hellers* and *kronen*.

The man looked dubiously at the unfamiliar coins, and lifted expressive shoulders.

"But Mademoiselle, what can I do with those?" he said. "Go in the house and get it from your friends."

Marie's heart sank. Suppose the Le Grands no longer lived here! Suppose a thousand things! But realizing that the man must be paid, she decided to do as he suggested. She stooped to pick up her bag, but he stopped her.

"Oh no, Mademoiselle, allow me," and taking it from her, he followed her to the door. It was a long way from the *Gare du Nord*. He was not anxious to lose sight of his fare.

A stout, red-haired man with weak eyes and a green apron tied loosely about him. opened the door.

"Does Monsieur Le Grand, Monsieur Jules Le Grand live here?" asked Marie nervously.

It seemed an age to her before he answered.

"But yes," he said at last, "they have been living here this long time."

"Will you take me to them, please?" Marie could have thrown her arms about his thick neck.

The man bowed politely, and picking up her bag, led the way.

She turned to the waiting driver.

"I'll send down your money. Wait, please!" she said, and followed the red-haired man through the doorway into the courtyard.

He handed her into the little *ascenseur*, and touching the button, bowed as he closed the door.

On the way up, Marie repeated a prayer of gratitude over and over to herself, adding one with the hope that these cousins would be glad to see her.

As she got out at the door of the Le Grand apartment, a neat little maid opened it.

"Is Monsieur Le Grand at home?" she asked timidly, and as the girl answered in the affirmative, she added, "tell him his cousin from Vienna—his cousin Marie Helmar is here!"

Almost as she spoke, a tall stout man with a heavy black beard appeared in the doorway of what seemed to be a little salon.

He looked at Marie a moment and then came toward her with both hands extended.

"Ah, my little cousin," he cried in a cheerful bass voice. "My little cousin! But I'm glad to see you. Welcome to Paris!" He kissed her resoundingly on

both cheeks, and drew her in through the door which the neat little maid closed after her.

"Oh, Cousin Jules," and Marie let the foolish tears run down her cheeks as they would, "I was so afraid you wouldn't remember me! I was so afraid you wouldn't live here any more!"

"*Maman*," called Monsieur Le Grand, "come and see who is here!"

"Please, cousin Jules," hesitated Marie, "the taxi driver is waiting. My money is all Austrian—could you——?" and she displayed her purse with its foreign coins.

The big man laughed.

"Surely, little cousin," he said, as he drew a leather bag from his pocket, and extracted the necessary francs. "Here, Julie, run and pay the man," and picking up Marie's bag he led the way into the salon.

Madame Le Grand was a pretty little woman, round and dimpled, her hair and eyes as black as the shining silk of her gown. Two tall, slim girls stood beside her, their eyes dark like their mother's, their straight hair loose over their shoulders.

"This is the little Marie, *Maman*," smiled the big man, "this is the little blond cousin from Vienna," and he led the girl forward.

Madame Le Grand kissed her affectionately as did both the girls. Monsieur Le Grand and *Maman*, who she found was to be called Cousin Françine, asking questions volubly. How long had she to stay? Why had she not let them know? Why had they not heard from her since the lawyer had written of her poor papa's death? Did she know how much she looked

like her poor papa? Or was it her poor mamma she resembled? And so on, and so on, until finally for sheer want of breath, they stopped, and Marie began.

"I didn't decide to come until the day before yesterday," she said in her careful French; "but now, I am not going back. I expect to make my home in Paris. I must find employment."

Monsieur Le Grand looked at her in surprise.

"You must earn your own living?"

"Yes; poor papa left me very little, and it is all gone."

Her cousins looked at each other sadly.

"Never mind," soothed the big black-bearded man, "to-day you will be comfortable and have a good rest. To-morrow we will discuss your affairs."

"Fleurette, my angel," said Madame to one of the girls, "show Cousin Marie into the little blue room. You can arrange your toilette, my dear, and afterward Sidonie will come and get you for luncheon."

Marie smiled gratefully. How wonderful things were. Madame patted her kindly on the arm as she turned and followed one of the two tall girls.

The blue room proved to be very pretty, dainty and sweet as the one Marie had had in her father's house. The sight of it brought back the thought of him bitterly, and tears welled into her eyes.

Fleurette comforted her shyly, and after refreshing her face and brushing out her soft hair with Fleurette's interested assistance, she opened her bag and shook out a fresh blouse which she proceeded to put on.

"What should I have done if you had moved

away?" she asked, and Fleurette shrugged expressive and sympathetic shoulders.

Presently, Sidonie, the second of the two sisters, came in to say that luncheon was ready, and with one of her young cousins on either arm, Marie went into the dining-room.

It was a happier meal than she had eaten for some time. Truly, she was born again. Here, no one knew anything about her, excepting that she had been raised in a convent and was her father's daughter. The girl found herself wondering if she were dreaming, if suddenly she should awaken and find that all these cheerful, black-eyed cousins had disappeared, and Von Pfaffen's hard, cruel face was opposite her.

But one thing she had learned from him was that her face must be a mask to conceal emotions, not a window to let them shine through.

She had learned that her "convent eyes" as Von Pfaffen used to call them, were a useful asset, and though her faith and trust in the world had died, she shut her resentment resolutely away and smiled.

The time passed pleasantly, and that night Marie slept soundly for the first time in many days. When she opened her eyes the next morning, the sun was streaming into her room. She felt it to be a happy omen, a harbinger of better things.

That afternoon Monsieur Le Grand called her to him.

"We have been talking, the good *Maman* and I," he said in his rumbling bass voice. "Would you like to stay here with us, even after your visit is over,

and, well, teach Fleurette and Sidonie the German language, a little painting, and perhaps some music? Would you like that? "

Maman smiled into her eyes.

"Would you, little cousin?" she asked.

Marie's heart was full. This was almost too good a fortune to be true, but she managed to answer them gratefully.

"You are so kind, so good, what would I have done if I had not found you? What I can, I will gladly do."

This past year was one that had shaken her faith in every one and everything, but surely these people must be genuine. She was afraid, however, to give way to the feeling of comfort and trust that filled her, her experiences had taught her suspicion of those about her. Sadly she realized that convention sometimes requires people to do and say things to impress the ear and the eye only. She knew now, that real personalities were guarded jealously. One's real self must be carefully concealed from the knowledge and the eyes of those with whom one came in contact. She was afraid to trust what seemed so sincere, so kindly. She must weigh even her seemingly generous cousins. She must try and analyze even their motives and be on her guard. But she also knew she must let none of these thoughts be seen.

She held out her hands to her cousin and his wife and looked into their eyes with her own wide blue ones, and so her new life, the life that was born again, began.

CHAPTER XIII

The days passed swiftly for Marie. The kindly hearts of the Le Grands were won almost immediately by her sweetness and charm, her appealing air of innocence that seemed to demand protection. They surrounded her with an atmosphere of love, of generous kindness, and Marie's nervousness began to leave her. She and the two girls took long walks through the blossoming *Bois*, or along the beautiful Champs Elysées. Fleurette and Sidonie never tired of showing their Austrian cousin the sights of their beloved Paris, and Marie found herself forgetting the bitter winter in Vienna. It was as though there had been some horrible nightmare from which she had awakened into the sunshine of spring.

At first, she used to start up suddenly in the night, shuddering with the thought of what would happen if her cousins should come to know the truth. Sometimes, while she was giving a German lesson to Fleurette and Sidonie, the familiar tones of her own language recalled the days in Vienna which she was trying to forget, and made her sink back into her chair, white and shaken.

At such times, Fleurette would pat her hand sympathetically and comfort her for what she supposed was homesickness, and Sidonie would jump to her feet.

"Come, Cousin, no more lessons now, the sun is shining, we must walk in the *Bois*."

Little by little, Marie's fears of their finding out faded away, and her conscience ceased to trouble her. No one who had known her in Vienna was ever likely to come here. Old Herr Schultz was dead, his wife would never leave her native country. Besides these two, there were only Von Pfaffen and the young Lieutenant, who knew; and they, she felt sure, would never cross her path again. Little by little her confidence in people began to return, at least in these cousins of hers and their friends. Her knowledge of human nature, of character, began to expand. She was able to put people in their proper niches, as it were, and hide her own fear and distrust under a cloak of shyness and reticence.

Happy in this pleasant environment, her cheeks grew round, her color came back, and the sparkle that was in her eyes in the convent days, shone from them again. Her cousin Jules, she found, was something of a personage, and there were always people of more or less importance coming to see him, but Marie and the two girls seldom met any of these visitors. Fleurette and Sidonie were still too young, and so she stayed with them, but on the days when there were no guests, the little family were all very happy together.

The Le Grands belonged to that class of French people whose family is the heart of their life, who live only for the development of their own immediate circle, who are economical, yet generous and hospitable, and Marie was beginning to realize that here she could shut away suspicion and be happy.

Monsieur Le Grand always insisted on hearing the

girls repeat their German verbs. He would burst into roars of laughter at their struggles with the heavy gutturals. Madame, on those occasions, always sat by a little table on which a red-shaded lamp lit up her dark prettiness and sparkled on her black silk gown, flashing back from her rings as she knitted or crocheted.

Marie's life was full. She gave the girls their lessons, took long walks with them and sometimes would go on a bewildering shopping excursion with Cousin Françine; and so gradually the bitterness of the past was shut away in a corner of her memory.

One afternoon, Sidonie burst into her room in great excitement, Fleurette following at her heels.

"Marie," she cried, "we are to be at dinner tonight! There will be a guest, but the good papa says we may come, because he is young, like us. We think he's wonderful. We hope you'll like him too."

"I am to wear my white lace dress with the blue sash," said Fleurette.

"And I shall wear mine, also," added Sidonie.

"But," began Marie, "I cannot come, I have nothing to wear!"

"Oh, yes you have," laughed Fleurette. "I unpacked your bag the night you came. I saw a pretty little white frock in it. It was badly crushed, but we'll take it to Julie, and she will press it out as good as new," and skipping to the clothes press, she began searching.

Marie remembered with a shudder, that she had crumpled the white dress she had worn at the "Two Eagles," into her bag. She abhorred the thought of

wearing it. It would bring back bitter memories, but she could not come to dinner when there would be a guest, dressed as she was.

The girls were examining the simple frock which Fleurette had unearthed.

"I think it's very nice," decided Sidonie. "I'll take it right down to Julie and she will press it for you."

"And you must do all this wonderful golden hair in a pretty fluffy way," said Fleurette, "no flat braids to-night, cousin. We'll all play that we're grown up. Won't it be fun!" and she danced away with the crushed white muslin over her arm.

Marie stood by her window thinking. She hated to put on the white dress, to pile her hair up under a high comb. It all seemed as though she were going to the "Two Eagles" again to sing. She wouldn't, she couldn't do it. She would tell the girls when they came in, that she was ill. She would make any excuse so as to stay in her room. She would destroy that dress. She wondered why she had ever brought it.

The window stood open to the soft June air. She leaned her head against the casing and let the breeze fan her hot cheeks.

She squared her shoulders. Why should the dress bring back memories? That life was dead and buried. It had never been! She turned from the window, and began to let down her fair hair as Fleurette and Sidonie came in carefully carrying the freshened muslin. It was beautifully pressed. They laid it primly across the bed.

"You will look just like one of the angels, all yellow

hair and white wings," said Fleurette, coming over to her, and drawing her shining tresses through her fingers.

"A little Sainte Marie," said Sidonie, and then glancing at her own reflection, she added, "I wish I were a blonde. Nobody ever thinks of a black Saint," and she made a grimace at her own image in the mirror.

"It is late now," reminded Marie. "Better go and dress. When you are ready, come back for me. I shall be frightened to meet a stranger alone."

The girls laughed and hurried away.

Marie closed the door after them. Then she went over to the bed and stood looking down on the fluffy whiteness in which she had been so miserable.

"What a horrible time I had when I wore you last," she said to it. "I wonder what will happen to-night," and half fearfully, she began arranging the wavy masses of her hair.

When the girls came back for her later, resplendent in their soft frocks, each with its pale blue sash tied in exactly the same manner, they uttered little shrieks of delight over Marie.

"But you are lovely, cousin," cried Fleurette. "Your shoulders are like snow." She looked very fair and golden in contrast to their vivid coloring.

"When I am grown, I shall do my hair like that," said Sidonie, "only it isn't the right color."

Marie laughed.

"Your hair is just the color it should be for you. Are you really pleased with me?"

They assured her joyously that she was perfection

itself, and indeed she was a dainty figure; rounder, more mature than on that day not so many months before, when she had donned the white frock to go to the "Two Eagles." There was a flush on her cheeks which had not been there the last time she had worn it.

"Come," she said, "let us go and see the good parents," and giving a hand to each of the girls they started sedately for the drawing-room.

"How charming you look this evening," smiled Le Grand. "You will like my young friend; he is an officer in the army. His parents live in a fine old château somewhere near the frontier."

Almost as he spoke, the maid opened the door and announced Captain de la Motte.

Fleurette and Sidonie, suddenly shy, stepped back of their mother, while Monsieur went forward to greet his guest.

He was a tall, slender man of about thirty, very sunburnt, with a lighter line across his forehead, where his cap had rested. His eyes were wide and brown, and his dark hair combed straight back from his forehead, had a slight wave in it. His mouth was full and almost Greek in outline, and the lean, strong lines of his face were clean shaven.

Monsieur Le Grand made the presentation in the graceful manner of the cultured Frenchman.

The visitor smiled a flashing smile that lit up his face and showed a row of very white, even teeth.

Marie sat shyly quiet through the evening, but her mind and eyes were alert. There was a boyish ingenuousness about this man that was refreshing.

It seemed to deny his knowledge of certain phases of life, seemed to stamp him as different from the men with whom she had come in contact. Surely there must be some men who could be trusted. She wondered if it were possible that back of those clear eyes, might lurk deception, whether the smile that seemed so worthy of trust, hid falseness. But in spite of the involuntary distrust that was the result of her experience, her interest was aroused. His frank *camaraderie* with her two young cousins, the amusing tales he told of the barracks, his keen sense of humor that was expressed in clear, hearty laughter, put her wonderfully at her ease, and above all things he had unmistakably that distinctive manner which proclaimed him a gentleman. It was a very pleasant evening, and when at last he rose to go, deep in her heart was a half-formed wish that here, at least, she might be off the guard she had so strictly imposed upon herself.

CHAPTER XIV

In her room that night, after he had left, Marie slipped off the white frock, shook out the folds almost tenderly and hung it carefully away. She stood for a moment in deep thought, then she went to the dressing-table and picking up the hand-mirror, began examining her delicate profile, the way her hair grew about the nape of her white neck. The blue ribbons in her dainty camisole outlined her slim shoulders and matched the blueness of her eyes. It was a very lovely face that looked back at her from the mirror. Marie had never thought of her personal appearance as a vital asset before; now, however, with the memory of a flashing smile, a frank boyish face before her, she examined herself closely. Was she really attractive, she wondered? She lacked the egotism, the self-knowledge which is able to catalogue its own charms. The desire to be appreciated, however, was strong in her. Her sensitive nature was instinctively conscious of approval or disapproval.

She rested her elbows on the dressing-table and propped her chin in her cupped hands. Could she dare hope for happiness such as came into the lives of other girls?

This was the sort of man that had filled her dreams at the convent, tall and straight, with the supple slimness of a man of action. But she had only dreamed. In actual life she had found men very different. Might not his pleasing manner and boyish

friendliness be only another sort of mask, hiding perhaps as much calculation, as much designing selfishness, as had that other of paternal kindness?

Her experience had been too bitter. She dared not lower the barriers a second time. She was in that most unhappy state of mind which follows the loss of faith and trust in others.

What was the matter with her, she wondered? Was it because the sight of a uniform had brought back recollections, or was it something she had read in the wide dark eyes as they looked into hers when he had said good-night?

She undressed slowly, and shook out her long hair. The window was open to the soft June night, and the breeze lifted the golden strands and blew them against her flushed cheeks. She switched off the light and stood for awhile looking out over the sleeping city. She looked almost like the Saint Genevieve of Puvis de Chavannes, in her straight nightrobe, her hair parted and drawn down into a long yellow braid, her bare feet white against the polished floor. The flashing smile that lit up the dark face shone across her mental vision. Would she see this man again, she wondered? Did she want to? She pulled the curtains across the window and crept into bed. For a long while she lay staring up through the velvety darkness.

She did want to see him again. She lived over the moment when their eyes had met, the blue ones and the brown ones that seemed to strike fire. Could this face too, with its clean lines and flashing smile, grow distorted and evil as she had seen the other?

At the thought, she buried her face fiercely in the pillow.

"No," she whispered to herself in the darkness. "No, I'll never see him again! I never want to! Men are all alike, I hate them!" and she began to tremble with cold under the covers on this warm June night.

After awhile, she fell into a troubled sleep and dreamed that she was singing again at the "Two Eagles" and that Captain de la Motte came and took her by the hand and led her to an open window, through which she could see a broad, beautiful landscape. It seemed to her that a great storm had just passed, the last clouds disappearing in the distance, and across the arch of the heavens stretched a wonderful rainbow. Birds were singing, and the air was sweet with the perfume of flowers. Just as she was about to start out with him into the sunlight, Von Pfaffen came between them and she awoke, weeping bitterly.

But de la Motte called again and yet again, and soon it became a matter of course that Marie and the two girls should meet him on their walks in the *Bois* and walk home together.

The young soldier's interest was perhaps accentuated by her very reticence, the difficulty he found in drawing her out, in making her believe in his friendship. Without letting him quite see her purpose, she set herself the task of making him prove himself in every way, and though her suspicious eyes were always seeking for a flaw, he withstood all her tests.

This was the beginning of many happy days. Madame, with the love of match-making, which lies

in every Latin heart, smiled and dimpled at young de la Motte every time he came, and managed to see that he and Marie were thrown together as much as possible.

Gradually, her shyness wore off and she found herself talking of the years spent at the convent, of her days with her father. But she always stopped short with his death, and de la Motte attributed the silences that followed, to her bereavement. He would change the subject to some trivial matter and soon the smiles would come back again.

He was like a big, carefree boy with the three girls, and as the days wore on, Marie began to realize that her happiness lay where he was.

The thought frightened her. She tried to reason with herself, to bring her experience to her aid. How could he, the sort of man who could win any girl, the son of General de la Motte, ever think of her, the penniless little cousin in his friend's household?

But after awhile, she hushed the voice of reason, and let herself drift along in a dream that had as its awakening the days between his visits.

One afternoon de la Motte called early. He had not been expected, and Madame Le Grand and the two girls had gone for a shopping tour, leaving Marie at home alone.

When the maid showed him into the salon where she was, the girl rose hastily from beside the little work-table where she had been stringing beads for the purse Madame was knitting. Her cheeks flushed prettily as she held out her hand to him.

"Cousin Françine and the girls will be disap-

pointed," she said, "but they will be home shortly. You will sit down awhile?"

He laughed as he drew a chair up beside her.

"Do you know, Mademoiselle, I suppose it's rude to say, but I can't feel badly that they are not here. I'm glad I find you alone!"

There was something in his manner that startled, almost frightened her. The smile faded from her lips. She dropped her eyes over her work and sat silent.

He watched her uneasily. What a difficult little person she was. The smile that had greeted him was so encouraging that he had almost uttered the words that were now nearly always at his tongue's end, yet here she was, frozen stiff again, safely ensconced behind the bars she so seldom let down. Her very diffidence spurred him to discover what lay back of those clear, wide eyes, those eyes that were so like a child's, and yet a child that had been badly frightened at something.

He leaned forward and covered her hand with his.

"Please put down your work, Mademoiselle."

She drew her hand away and hastily rose to her feet. Her fears had been well grounded. He was like the rest.

"I'm sorry, Monsieur," she said breathlessly. "I'm sorry—I—I thought we were such good friends. I'm sorry to have it spoiled!"

He rose too, puzzled.

"Mademoiselle, what have I done to make you think I want to spoil something for which I have been striving?"

She raised her eyes that wanted so to believe in some one. The look she saw in his, made her flush with a new, ecstatic wonder. If she could only believe it.

He seemed to read her doubts, to understand the fear that tore at her heart.

"Marie," he said softly, "love to me is a very wonderful thing, so wonderful and precious that I am old-fashioned enough to think it must only be offered where one wishes to give one's life. Some day, perhaps, you will let me speak to you again of this," and stooping, he touched his lips for a moment to her fingers and left the room.

Marie sat for a long while after he had gone, with her hands idle in her lap, her eyes filled with a vision of what might be. Confidence, faith, where she so longed to bestow it! If it only could be true! She began to realize that here was a different love than had been offered her before, a love that had respect for its foundation.

When her cousins returned, they found her sitting in the gloaming, dreaming, with so little of her work done, that they laughed and called her "lazy one," and said she must come with them and see all their purchases, and with her mind singing over the hope of that "some day" that he had spoken of, she went with Fleurette and Sidonie.

CHAPTER XV

For some time after this, de la Motte did not come to the Avenue Victor Hugo. Cousin Jules reported that he was busy with his military duties. There was some activity at the *caserne*. Soldiers were drilling for a review, but he sent his kindest greetings and promised to be with them again as soon as it might be possible. But he was never absent from Marie's thoughts, and she dreamed the glad dreams that youth knows when love has come.

When he came again, it was to ask Marie to meet his family. They were in Paris for a few weeks, while his sister, who was to be married shortly, bought some of her *trousseau*.

"I want them to meet you," he said. "I want you to know my sister Paulette; I know you will be friends."

Marie lifted her eyes to his. Could she dare to hope that what she saw there was true? She was almost afraid to dream it, afraid to let him tell her so. He was so different from any she had known, with his flashing smile, his clear eyes that looked so steadily into hers. She wanted, above all things, to believe in him.

So it was arranged that Monsieur and Madame Le Grand were to take her to call on his family.

The girls helped her with her simple toilet. Her hat must be set just at the right angle, her gloves,

her shoes, must all be perfect. They were as excited as she was over the prospective visit. Madame also was dreaming dreams.

"You will like the General," she said. "He is a very gallant old soldier. He will not frighten you, cousin; and Madame and Paulette are charming."

"Everybody will love you, little Sainte Marie," said Fleurette, "everybody must"; and Sidonie added, "But, of course, how can it be otherwise?"

The de la Motte family were staying at a hotel on the Place Vêndome, one of those hotels whose unpretentious exterior gives no indication of the refined comfort to be had within. It was the hotel at which the family always lived when in Paris, and its proximity to the Rue de la Paix made it particularly convenient now for the purchasing of Paulette's *trousseau*.

She was to be married to a young Belgian officer, Gerome had explained, Maurice le Cerf. They had grown up together, and both families had been looking forward to this event for years. Maurice's home was not far from the Château de la Motte, which was situated close to the border, and the young lovers, were seldom separated. Their marriage was to take place some time in August.

Gerome opened the door of his father's suite for them.

Back of him smiled the General, who held out a cordial hand to Marie as they entered. He was a tall, well built man of about sixty, his gray hair was brushed back from his forehead, a heavy grayish mustache hid his mouth, and over his keen blue eyes

hung thick, grizzled eyebrows, one of which was lifted a trifle, giving him a kindly, quizzical expression. There was a strong resemblance between father and son, but the elder's features were more massive. He was taller, heavier, more powerfully built.

As the visitors came into the room, a lady rose from a chair by the window. She was tall and beautifully poised, and the simple lines of her dark dress set off her figure. Her hair was almost white and rolled back from her face in a smartly dressed coiffure. Her wide, dark eyes were so like Gerome's that Marie did not need his words to confirm the fact that she was his mother.

She greeted her with cordial grace, her sweet informality, immediately putting the girl at her ease.

There was some little conversation between Madame Le Grand and the hostess, concerning various mutual acquaintances and things that interested them, and then Gerome's mother turned again to Marie.

They talked awhile of many things, of the charm of Vienna, of how she liked Paris; and when they found she knew no more of France, they promised her that she should see all of their beautiful country. Monsieur Le Grand told some anecdotes of her father, and his wife smiled fondly at Marie as she spoke of the days with them since she had come to Paris.

Presently a very pretty girl came in from another room. She was, perhaps a year younger than Marie, slender, with dark hair which waved softly back from a smooth, white forehead. From under her straight black brows her eyes looked out with just a hint of superciliousness. If there could be any criti-

cism of the lovely face, it was perhaps, that the features were too regular, for beauty is accentuated by some slight defect that enhances it by comparison.

She was dressed for the street in a smart, dark brown walking suit and a wide-brimmed sailor hat. Her slender feet and trim ankles were cased in bronze shoes and silk stockings.

Gerome rose to greet her.

"Paulette," he said, "this is Mademoiselle Helmar."

Paulette smiled her brother's flashing smile.

"Gerome has told us much about you," she said. "We have been looking forward to your visit," and after shaking hands with the Le Grands, she crossed the room and sat on the arm of her mother's chair. Her words had been gracious, her manner all that it should be, but there was a subtle something that took Marie's ease from her and brought back her nervousness. The almost too classic face held a vague suspicion of her, a vague challenge. It was as though she were saying, "Who are you? What is it in you that has captured my brother? I resent it. I'm not sure whether you are good enough for him. I am not sure anyone is!"

The family were to be in Paris another week, it seemed, and the General made plans for them to go to the theatre together, "so that we may grow to know one another," he explained.

Marie blushed as she thanked him, and it was decided that early in the week she should dine with them and they would go to the Opéra Comique, or perhaps the Théâtre Française afterward.

Monsieur Le Grand, in his deep bass voice, rum-

bled out plans for them to come to the Avenue Victor Hugo; Madame smiled and dimpled as she seconded his invitation, and presently they rose to go.

"We will see you very soon, I hope," she smiled, as she made her adieux, and turning to Paulette, she wished her again much happiness.

Marie smiled timidly as she bade Madame de la Motte good-bye.

"It has made me happy to meet you," she said.

Madame kissed her cheek.

"Gerome's friends are ours," she said kindly.

The Le Grands pleaded another engagement, so Gerome was to see Marie home.

It was a beautiful June day and the Paris streets through which they drove sparkled in the sunshine. The motor was well on its way along the Champs Elysèes before either of them spoke.

Marie was nervously silent, and he, too, sat staring straight ahead of him. Every now and then she stole a glance at the brown profile beside her. She was conscious of an almost irresistible longing to put out her hand and touch him. She grasped her parasol handle tightly and dropped her eyes.

At last Gerome turned to her.

"You like my family?" he asked.

"Your mother is wonderful," she said. "You have her eyes."

"I resemble the General more, they tell me. He is fond of saying how much I am like he was at my age."

"You are like him," she answered, as though reviewing his qualities. "He is very splendid!"

"And Paulette?" asked Gerome.

Marie's eyes dropped.

"She is very pretty," she said non-committally. She was still feeling the girl's appraising eyes, the subtle something that had put a wall between them.

Gerome laughed.

"I was afraid you wouldn't understand her," he said. "She is very badly spoiled, and just now nothing or no one exists outside of Maurice and her *trousseau*. You will love Paulette when you know her better."

"I am certain I will," she hastened to assure him.

Gerome looked at her steadily.

"I am glad you like them, Marie," he said seriously, his voice shaking a little. "It means much to me."

He was silent the rest of the way, and the girl's heart beat happily. He cared for her. There was no doubting the look in his eyes. Love, real love, the kind she had dreamed of, had prayed for, was coming into her life. For a moment she grew cold with the fear that something might come to take it away. She remembered the dream she had had the night she had first met him, and the thought that perhaps some shadow of her life in Vienna might come between them, sent the blood from her cheeks and lips and left her still and white.

The torturing thought came to her again as it had so many times since she began to realize the seriousness of his intentions. Could she in honor accept this happiness if it were offered? Had she the right to accept it from any man?

When they reached the Avenue Victor Hugo, her

cousins had not yet arrived and the two girls were out with Julie for their walk.

They sat in the little salon, talking for a moment or so, and then Gerome rose.

"I must go on now," he said. "I shall see you tomorrow."

Marie nodded, not trusting herself to speak. She knew her voice would shake and tremble as she was trembling.

She gave him her hand. Gerome took it, and held it tight. For a moment they looked into each other's eyes, and then suddenly, he drew her to him, crushing her in his arms.

"Marie," he whispered, "I love you! I want you! Say yes to me! Say yes!" and in the dizzy ecstacy that his nearness brought her, her resolutions, her fears melted away. Her heart throbbing wildly, she could only cling close to him, murmuring, "Yes."

Then followed long silences, broken by murmured vows, happy anticipation, hopes, plans, promises. The old, old story ever new.

When he was gone she shut herself in her room. She was glad the family were out. She didn't want to see anyone just now. She didn't want to have to answer their eager questions as to how she liked Gerome's people, and how they had liked her. She didn't want to discuss things with her cousins yet. Her happiness was too great, too wonderful. It seemed a sacred thing.

Now she knew that though there was grief, sorrow, pain in the world, cruelty and villiany, still, there was real love, love and the sacrifices love will make. It

came over her with a great surge of joy, that after all, everything she had always dreamed of, hoped for, was in the world, just as bitter experience had taught her that other things existed as well.

There was love and all that is part of perfect, reciprocated affection. With a great wonder, she asked herself, did Fate really mean to be kind? Had she escaped the consequences of her inexperience?

She looked at her face in the mirror. Was this the same girl, she wondered, who had come to Paris so short a while ago, eyes red from weeping, and a heart bitterly sore with the world? The face that shone back from the mirror, was radiant with the mysterious glow that comes to a woman when she loves and is loved. She looked at the deep blue of her eyes, sparkling with happiness. She looked at her parted red lips, that could still feel his kisses, and then, suddenly, the light went out of her eyes, the smile died, and she threw herself face down on her bed. What would he do if he knew, she wondered. She couldn't lose him, she couldn't give him up. Her imagination showed her the lovelight killed in his eyes and a look of loathing taking its place.

"I couldn't bear it," she sobbed dryly. "I won't bear it!" She could still feel his heart beating against her breast, his breath warm on her cheek.

"Dear God in heaven," she prayed, "don't take him from me! I love him! I love him! Keep him from ever knowing! Dear God in Heaven!"

She jumped to her feet and brushed her hair out of her eyes.

"He'll never know!" she said between her teeth.

"He can't ever find out! I won't give him up! I won't!"

That life was a chapter to be closed forever. She had been swept into it not against her will, but because she had had no will in the matter, no power of choice or discrimination.

Those months at the café, and with Von Pfaffen, shuddered across her memory like some horrible nightmare.

She would sponge them from her very mind, erase them from her imagination.

Squaring her shoulders, and holding her chin high, Marie looked at her image again in the mirror, and as she saw the color coming back to her cheeks, the light in her eyes, she knew that she had chosen the path that she was to follow, and that whatever came, she would fight to hold this love that had come into her life, to put herself in tune with him, to make herself worthy.

CHAPTER XVI

The General called with Gerome the next day and the two were closeted for some time with Monsieur Le Grand.

Marie had seen them arrive from her window. Nervously, she walked up and down her room, waiting to be sent for.

When at last Fleurette and Sidonie came in for her, their faces were glowing with excitement.

"They want you at once in papa's study," cried Fleurette.

"But you shan't go until you tell us why," announced Sidonie. Marie was flushed and eager.

"Let me by, you bad children," she laughed, trying to push them aside. "How should I know why they want me?"

Fleurette threw her arms about her neck.

"Don't be angry, dear," she said. "We were only teasing, of course we'll let you go," and the way clear, she went into the little salon.

Gerome came forward to greet her as she stood shyly at the door, and the light in his eyes was such a happy one that Marie felt as though she were lifted into Heaven.

"My little wife that is to be," he whispered, and led her into the room.

Madame was busy arranging on a small table the tray of wine and cakes which the maid had just

brought in. Monsieur Le Grand took both her hands in his.

"Well," he laughed in his big rumbling voice, "what is this I hear about your leaving us?"

The General kissed her on both cheeks.

"She is a rather nice little daughter for an old man to have, isn't she now?" and he smiled quizzically.

Marie's cup of happiness was too full. Was she the little orphan, who only a few months ago had stood irresolutely on the corner of a street in Vienna, wondering where she was going, what was to become of her? To have all this love, this joy, showered on her, was too wonderful, too much. She hid her face on Gerome's convenient shoulder.

It seemed that Monsieur Le Grand's talk with the General had been more than satisfactory and all that now remained, was to arrange for the marriage to take place as soon as possible.

Gerome insisted on an early date. His suggestion was that now since the family were all in Paris, why not have the wedding immediately.

Marie felt curiously like a detached witness of all this, not at all as though she were one of the principals. It seemed so like a dream, that she let them discuss arrangements, and sat happily silent, her hand held tightly in Gerome's.

It was finally decided that as the de la Motte family were to go back to the country the third week in June, Gerome and Marie should be married a few days before they left. That would give Cousin Françine at least ten days to get the little bride ready.

While her new relatives and her cousins were drinking each other's health and wishing each other many felicitations and a better acquaintance; while the General was toasting Cousin Françine's pretty face and the two tall girls; while Monsieur was beaming on everybody collectively, Gerome drew Marie into the window seat.

"Are you happy, dear?" he asked as they settled themselves.

Marie could not answer, her heart was too full. She looked up into his glowing face and smiled.

Gerome, unlike most Frenchmen of his class, had taken the world seriously. He had always looked forward to the day when he should meet the One Woman. His life had been well-ordered and clean, so that when he came to her, he should be able to lay the pages of that life before her and say, "Dearest, I have lived for you and for the day of our meeting." His fellow officers had twitted and laughed at him for a purist. They said that he had been born into the wrong world, no woman was worth it. But Gerome had gone his way, taking their chaffing. He had smiled into the eyes of many pretty women, flirted lightly with others, but never let his life be touched. "I'm really a henpecked bachelor," he used to tell his companions, laughing. "I haven't yet met the girl whom I am going to marry, but she keeps me from a lot of mischief into which I might otherwise fall."

When he had met Marie, her blond loveliness, her simplicity and shyness, had won him at once, and he had told himself that first day, that here was the

woman for whom he had been waiting, for whom he had kept himself clean and fine.

When he had spoken to his family of her, the General, with his characteristic clear-sightedness, had realized that Romance had found his son, and that whatever he or Madame might say against one of whom they knew almost nothing, would only serve to bring unhappiness to them all. They were a singularly united family and the thought of disagreement coming among them, was impossible to realize.

The General and his wife had discussed the matter quietly by themselves and had come to the conclusion not to give an opinion for or against, till they had seen this girl who had so suddenly come into Gerome's life.

Paulette, however, had demurred. Her brother was so much to her, she hated to think of giving him up to another woman, dreaded a stranger being brought into their midst. Her fiance had been raised with them all. She could never remember a time when Maurice had not been near. But this was different, and a girl from a strange country, too, Paulette demurred.

The General and Madame de la Motte had asked Gerome to bring Marie to see them, and her sweetness and simplicity had won their hearts. Besides, the General knew and respected Monsieur Le Grand, and he stood sponsor for the little stranger.

"She is the daughter of a great scholar," he had told the General, "the husband of a cousin of mine. The girl has been raised in a convent. She is an orphan. Her father lost his fortune, and she tried

to support herself giving piano lessons and teaching French in Vienna. She could not succeed, so she came to us. That is her life," and he added that Madame was planning to give the girl her *trousseau* as a wedding gift.

Things had shaped themselves beautifully, but as Gerome sat with Marie's small hand in his on the window seat, while his father and her cousins toasted one another, he knew that even if things had developed differently, he had come to his journey's end. He had found the One Woman.

When they had left, and the family had excitedly talked over everything, and Marie had been affectionately kissed, she had begged them to excuse her, and had hurried away to dream of her happiness in the quiet of her room. Her cousins' promises of the gifts they were to give her had stirred her deeply.

These good people, how wonderful they were to her, and she—she was going to Gerome empty handed. She drew out from under the neat pile of clothing in the dresser drawer, the purse she had brought from Vienna. She shook out the few *hellers* and *kronen* and the two thin bank notes which she had never touched since her arrival. That was all the dowry she could bring her husband. She stared down at the little heap of Austrian money lying on the white cover of her bureau.

Suddenly, she seemed to see Von Pfaffen's nervous fingers stirring among the bank notes, and the realization of what that money meant, rushed over her in a wave of shame. She picked up the thin pieces of paper and tore them frantically into shreds. Then

she gathered the bits of other money together with the scraps and threw them all as far as she could out of her window. The coins tinkled along the sidewalk, wheeling in half circles on their edges before they settled in the gutter. There was scarcely any breeze stirring, and the thin scraps of paper zig-zagged slowly in the air. She watched them scatter along the pavement, her hands held out, her fingers spread apart. She had thrown from her the last of her life in Vienna.

The days that followed were spent in a whirl. There were clothes to buy, there was the little apartment to see in the Avenue d'Antin, which Gerome had selected, there was so much to do, that it left Marie dizzy.

Madame Le Grand was in her element. She hurried the girl from one shop to another, planned and fussed and rushed about from morning till night, the two girls at her heels, eager and flushed, and filled with vague dreams of the time when all this excitement should be for them.

The day before the wedding, she came to Marie as she was dressing for the dinner her cousins were giving for the two families, and sat down for a few minutes to chat.

"It's wonderful that this has come to you, Marie," she said. "You know we are sending the two girls to the convent next fall, and your Cousin Jules and I had thought of a winter on the Riviera. We haven't had a vacation together for so long. There would be nothing for you to do then, would there?"

Marie was arranging her hair as she answered.

"You have been very good to me, Cousin Françine, I can never thank you enough."

Madame made a little denying gesture.

"Don't speak of that, dear child," she said rising. "Now I must go, my guests will soon be here. You will go to confession to-night, of course."

Marie looked up at her startled. Since her arrival here in Paris, she had gone regularly with the family to mass, but as yet she had not been to confession. She had kept away, promising herself and the *Curé*, Père Gaspard, who was the family friend and advisor, that soon she would go to him. Once, when the *Curé* had reminded her of her duty, she had turned so white, that he had patted her hand reassuringly.

"There, there, Mademoiselle," he had told her, "you can wait till you know me better. I'm sure the sins on your soul are not such that we need worry over them."

When Madame had left the room, Marie sat staring into her mirror. She saw nothing of the confusion of the simple bridal finery about her, nothing of her own image reflected in the glass. Her only thought was that now she must go to confession. What should she say?

When she went at last into the salon, the family and their guests were all assembled, Madame de la Motte, looking very regal in her shimmering gray satin with a string of handsome pearls about her throat, kissed her cordially as the girl came to her side.

In Paulette's bright eyes was still the vague suspicion that Marie had read there that first day, but

she held out her hand and flashed her brilliant smile.

Marie, of course, knew no one in Paris and it had been decided to have the marriage as simple as possible, so there were only the two families, Père Gaspard and Maurice le Cerf, Paulette's fiance, who had come to see the *corbeille de mariage* and to the dinner which the Le Grands were giving the little cousin as a farewell.

Madame Le Grand smiled and dimpled at her guests, radiant in a new shining silk, and the two girls, their slim legs in black silk stockings, their white frocks encircled with huge blue sashes, stood stiffly behind their mother, looking at Marie with a new interest.

Maurice le Cerf, never far from the side of his pretty fiancée, welcomed Marie into their midst with a boyish cordiality that won her heart immediately. He was a slender, brown-skinned young officer, his long, delicate features giving him something of a Spanish cast. A small mustache shaded a rather full red mouth, and the light gray eyes shone out curiously from his dark face.

Marie was happy, deliriously happy. Her terror of confession was forgotten. She was content to sit with her hand in Gerome's, her eyes on his. Just to know that he was near, was comfort, to realize that he was hers, left her dizzy and breathless.

Both families had been generous with the gifts they had given the young people, and the wonders of the *corbeille de mariage* having been duly investigated and exclaimed over, they all sat down to dine in a happy, joyful frame of mind. Even Fleurette

and Sidonie forgot their shyness and began to giggle over whispered remarks, and to nudge each other surreptitiously.

The General, his quizzical eyebrow more quizzically raised than ever, at his place next his jovial host, was full of entertaining anecdotes about Morocco, Tunis and the savages along the Congo, where he had served as a young man.

Monsieur Le Grand laughed his rumbling bass chuckle in appreciation, and capped the Congo stories with bits of curious doings in the city offices.

Cousin Françine smiled and dimpled and gave whispered orders to the two hired waiters who were assisting Julie, the maid.

Madame de la Motte patted Marie's hand as she now and then added a laughing word to the General's reminiscences.

Paulette and Maurice whispered together at their side of the table.

Marie let her eyes wander away from the beloved brown ones at her side. She was conscious of a feeling of well-being, a sense of protection, until her eyes came to rest on the black coat of the *Curé*. It came over her again in a terrifying flash, that Pére Gaspard was the symbol of what might stand between her and all this happiness. She lost her sense of what was going on about the table, as she stared at the old man's wrinkled face with its high nose and thin, white hair. It was a kindly, sympathetic face, but to Marie, the deep lines about the mouth, looked sinister, the furrows between the eyes, stern and unre-

lenting. She drew her breath sharply and tightened her fingers on Gerome's hand.

She couldn't go to confession, she couldn't tell about Vienna, about the café and Von Pfaffen and all the rest, she couldn't. Then she remembered, how during that long journey, she had murmured over and over, "When I reach Paris, I shall be born again, I shall be born again! Nothing of this has really ever happened!"

Père Gaspard smiled at her across the table. With an effort she turned her eyes away.

"I have been born again," she told herself desperately. "I have no sins to confess!"

* * * * * * *

The next morning early, she was awakened by Fleurette's kiss.

"Lazy little Sainte Marie," she laughed. "This is your wedding day. Sidonie and I are going to communion with you now, so hurry."

Marie sprang out of bed and threw open her curtains.

"What a wonderful wedding day," she laughed joyously, "the whole world is happy with me."

When she was ready in her simple blue walking suit and hat, the two girls, both dressed exactly alike, clung one to each arm, as they started light-heartedly toward the church.

"Marie, just think, by noon to-day you will be Madame," said Sidonie wonderingly, "aren't you frightened?"

"I'm sure I shouldn't be, only I should be wild with excitement," said Fleurette.

"Marie isn't even that, are you?" and Sidonie gently pinched her arm to get her attention, for the girl's thoughts had been far away from these two little inquisitive chatterboxes, tripping by her side, through the lovely June sunshine along the Champs Elysées.

"Not even excited," she whispered, coming back to her surroundings, "only very, very happy!"

Communion over and the tears brushed away that the words of the kindly old priest had brought to her eyes, they hurried back to the Avenue Victor Hugo to make ready for the wedding.

Marie was lovely in the white frock that Madame had taken such pains in selecting for her. Her golden hair shone round her face like a saint's halo, and the filmy masses of the white veil, floated mistily about her. Gerome had given her a small bar of diamonds which she wore among the laces at her throat, and her eyes, deep blue, unclouded and happy, shone like stars. Marie was lovely.

As they drove to the *Mairie* in the flower-decorated carriage, Gerome leaned toward her, the pride of possession lighting up his radiant face.

"I know why they call you little Sainte Marie," he said softly; "you look as though you had just stepped down from heaven." He lifted her fingers to his lips, "and you are mine, all mine!"

The ceremony at the *Mairie* was short and quickly over and they went directly to the Madelaine. As she followed the huge Swiss in his scarlet coat and great black hat, down the dim aisle, her heart seemed to stop beating. She was unconscious of everything,

excepting the gleam of light on the tip of his staff, and the soft crunching of his great black patent leather boots as he plodded on ahead of them. Everything was a confusion of dim shadows, of tall candles flickering and flashing, of masses of flowers and swaying wreathes of incense.

Almost in a dream, she knelt at Gerome's side, exaltedly she made her responses and kissed the Host. The low, deep tones of the organ thrilled through the dim aisles, mounted in an ecstatic burst of melody, up, up into the very heights of the great church.

The huge Swiss swung his staff and started majestically back toward the vestry room. Gerome took her hand, and still in a dream, she followed. It wasn't until they were once more out in the sunlight standing on the broad steps of the Madelaine, as they waited for their white cockaded coachman to answer the signal of the dignified Swiss, that Marie woke suddenly to a realization of what had taken place.

The June sunshine touched her lovingly with its golden rays, and sent little blue and crimson lights dancing in the diamonds of the pin at her throat as it trembled with the throbbing of her heart. She looked up at the tall figure at her side in its resplendent uniform, the quiet strength of the handsome profile, the confident lift of the broad shoulders. Her heart was full of a great thanksgiving, an adoring love beyond words.

Gerome, her husband!

CHAPTER XVII

THE short honeymoon was spent at Interlaken, which Gerome had chosen because of the quiet as well as the beauty. He wanted Marie to himself.

As he threw the long windows wide, the morning after their arrival, he uttered an involuntary exclamation at the scene of beauty spread before him. They had arrived late the night before and the full wonder of an Alpine sunrise shone out before their eyes.

Marie came to his side.

"How marvelous!" she whispered, her eyes wide with the splendor of the scene.

He put his arm about her shoulders, and together they stepped out onto the tiny balcony outside the window. Below them, the busy little Aa purled and gurgled on its way to the lake. Some sleek, spotted cows ambled lazily across the bridge, their bells tinkling musically through the still morning air. A small, red-cheeked boy prodded them idly with a long, crooked stick.

Above them, the mighty peaks flung themselves high into the clear blue sky, like huge giants supplicating the morning sun. Here and there along their sides the mists filled tiny valleys, here and there lay deep impenetrable shadows, but the snow on their summits glittered and sparkled with the pink of the Alpine glow.

To Marie, as she stood with her husband's arm about her, came a swift, half conscious premonition that her own life would be something like this vast panorama spread before her; that she, too, would be called upon to climb through the mist-filled valleys, to fight her way through dark, impenetrable shadows, up, up into the glow of the shining heights.

They had their breakfast out on the tiny balcony, a delicious meal of crisp, crescent rolls and little hollow swirls of sweet butter, clear golden honey and steaming, fragrant coffee.

The buxom maid who served it, wore a black velvet bodice with silver buttons, and the crisp white folds of her ample apron matched the snow on the summit of the *Jungfrau*. Her cheeks were so red that the blood seemed bursting from them, and her bright eyes sparkled back the happiness in the eyes of the pair she was serving.

Marie had tied her hair back, schoolgirl fashion, with a huge bow, and after the red-cheeked maid had left them, she came and sat on the arm of Gerome's chair.

"What would I have done if you had never found me," she said musingly, as she smoothed his thick hair. "Out of the darkness, we met! You led me into a world of light and love. How wonderful it is!" Her eyes were large and mysterious as they gazed over the far spaces of the valley.

"But we did meet, little Sainte Marie, and we're never going to part, are we?"

She tightened her arm about his neck.

"Nothing or no one shall ever take you from me,"

she said, and she spoke so earnestly that Gerome turned in his chair and held her off at arm's length.

"How serious you are," he smiled, "as if that could be possible."

"Nothing must separate us, I'd—I'd die without you," she said, and jumping to her feet, she ran into the room.

Marie found amusement and interest in everything and everybody about her. She and Gerome were like two children out on a holiday, and played wonderful games of imagining the life stories of their fellow guests at the quiet little hotel.

Their first meal at the long *table d'hôte* was one of absorbing interest to her. The maids who served were each an exact counterpart of the red-cheeked girl who had brought them their breakfast, black velvet bodice, silver buttons, white apron and all.

Across from them, sat a very dignified German family. The Baron Von Dieskow, a tall, good-looking old man who looked at Marie with a pair of very sparkling eyes set in a handsome, merry face, burnt quite red, had an explosive way of saying "NO!" to everything one said, as though it was the most wonderful thing in the world. The Baroness—he was her third husband, she told Marie—was a pretty little English woman. She brought forward a young lady daughter, very homely and dowdyish and distinctly German, although she spoke English to Gerome, who liked to air his knowledge of that language, with a pronounced Picadilly accent. There were also two young children who curtsied and kissed Marie's hand when their mother presented them.

The Baron, it seemed, had met Gerome's father once in Paris, and there were many polite inquiries as to the General's health, and soon he and Gerome were deep in the discussion of mountain climbing and hunting.

"I am not a very good shot," Marie heard the Baron say with his merry litle eyes sparkling, "in fact, I'm not at all fatal to the birds. Once, however, I frightened one, but that's all," and he and Gerome laughed heartily.

Next Marie, sat a faded little maiden lady from Yorkshire with a Mona-Lisa smile. She spoke French very slowly and very badly, and hyphenated all her speeches with a nervous little cough.

There was also a sandy-haired, pale-eyed man who made Marie think of nothing so much as a tom-cat with his back up. He was a major something-or-other, of what nationality she could not judge. He smiled at her in a horrid, over-polite way, and confided to her across the table that he had been a monk for fourteen years in the great Certosa at Florence.

"I thought they never let anyone out, who once entered there," ventured Marie timidly.

"I'm sure, Madame, they would never let you out," he said, evidently meaning to be witty, but Marie colored and turned away to watch the other people about the long table.

Gerome's discussion with the Baron was still going on briskly, and she had ample leisure to study the curious combinations of people who drift together, "doing Europe."

At the end of the table sat a group of Americans,

whose joyous good humor and interest in everything attracted her attention. She did not understand the laughing sallies which flew back and forth, but their merriment was so infectious that she smiled with them.

In Vienna the people were all of a type. It was easy for her to recognize a foreigner. In Paris also, the people resembled one another, so that she never had any difficulty in distinguishing which were French and which were of an alien race, but no two of these Americans were alike. They all wore something of the same sort of clothes, but there the resemblance ended.

Her curious eyes widened over the quantity of jewelry several of the women wore, no matter what the hour of the day. One of the men in the party, a tall, broad-shouldered individual, with a florid face and a loud laugh, seemed to fill all his conversation with uncomplimentary comparisons of the comforts to be had in Europe with those at home. His fellow countrymen seemed to heartily agree with his sentiments.

One of the women, a stout, elderly person, who boasted neither style nor figure, turned to Marie with a question. Marie shook her head, blushing.

"Pardon me, Madame," she said, "I speak no English."

The shout of laughter from the other Americans that greeted her answer, startled her, until, to her confusion, she discovered that the elderly woman had addressed her in what she fondly imagined was French.

"Isn't it all interesting?" laughed Marie, as cling-

ing to her tall husband's arm, they started for a walk about the countryside. Everything was wonderful to her, and Gerome, watching the sun sparkle on her hair and dance in her bright eyes found everything wonderful too.

They explored the little town, wandered about in all the out-of-the-way corners, took long rambles up the mountain sides, and in the lovely June evenings, sat on the tiny balcony, her cheek against his shoulder, and watched the marvel of the gold, crimson and purple sunsets among the giant peaks upflung against the gleaming sky.

It was a perfect week, and when it drew to a close, and they were leaving for Paris, their boxes and bags strapped and ready in the hall below, in charge of the green-aproned porter, Marie ran back to the room in which she had been so happy. She looked about hastily and lovingly at the plain hotel furniture, the wide, marble-topped dresser, the great chair on the arm of which she had sat so often as Gerome smoked his morning cigar. She went about to each inanimate object and patted it lovingly.

"Dear room," she whispered, "where I have been so happy. How I have loved each one of all these things!"

The long windows were open, and she stepped out for a moment onto the balcony. She looked up at the glistening *Jungfrau*. Its majesty, its whiteness filled her with wonder.

"Beautiful mountain," she said softly. "You have looked down on my happiness, I shall always remem-

ber you." Then she turned and went to meet Gerome where he was waiting in the hall.

The proprietor of the hotel was at the door. He was a queer, thin little man who almost wept over their hands as he bade them good-bye.

"Oh, but you must not go, really, you must not go! I am desolated to see you go," he said, and they would probably have been highly flattered had they not heard him say the same thing to each departing guest.

Back in Paris, the Le Grands, Monsieur, Madame and the two tall girls were at the little apartment in the Avenue d'Antin to greet them. They had engaged Suzanne, Julie's younger sister, to come and take charge of the small household, and she it was who, very important and smiling in white cap and apron, opened the door to the young couple when they arrived.

The trip from Geneva had been a long dusty one, and Marie was tired, but her joy was very real at seeing these kind faces again.

Monsieur nearly shook Gerome's hand off, and patted him vigorously on the shoulder.

"We're glad you're both back," he rumbled. "How well you look, how brown! Even Marie has been kissed by the sun."

The two girls must show Marie everything. She must see her room with its dainty gray furniture, the delicate lavender hangings. She must be taken into Gerome's room beyond. Wasn't it charming? Didn't she like the way it was arranged? And the white and gold salon, the tiny dining-room with its

shining silver and china. The kitchen, wasn't it all wonderful?

Marie let them lead her from room to room. She couldn't be too grateful, too happy. Her dream was growing in loveliness.

Suzanne had spread a dainty meal in the dining-room, coffee, little cakes, wine and some cold meat and rolls, and as they sat about the table, they all chattered at once.

At last Monsieur looked at his watch.

Dear me, how late it was, they mustn't keep these tired travelers awake any longer.

Suzanne, all smiles, brought Madame's wrap and the girl's coats.

Monsieur, his walking-stick under one arm and Madame under the other, led the way out, after kissing Marie resoundingly on both cheeks and patting Gerome on the shoulder and telling him what a lucky dog he was.

Later, Gerome came to the door of his wife's dainty gray and lavender room. She was letting down her heavy golden braids, and the sleeves of her negligée fell away from her white arms, as she raised them to her hair. She looked very lovely against the misty background of the pretty room, and his eyes swept her fondly. She let her hair fall about her shoulders and held her arms out to him.

"My dearest," she said, "welcome, welcome home!"

Gerome held her against his breast.

"My little Sainte Marie," he whispered.

CHAPTER XVIII

The little apartment in the Avenue d'Antin shone like a carefully kept doll's house. Marie, indulging her fancy for dainty clothes, went about the tiny rooms dressed in the prettiest frocks in her modest *trousseau.*

There were visits back and forth between her cousins and herself. Fleurette and Sidonie spent long afternoons with her, which she did her best to fill with interest and enjoyment for them, getting out her finest china for the afternoon chocolate. They never ceased to wonder at her new dignity, her staid little air of matronliness, secretly promising themselves to copy it when they should be married. When the time came for Julie to call for them, it always seemed too soon, and Marie used to stand at her window and wave good-bye to them till they had turned the corner.

There were afternoons, too, when she would take her sewing in a dainty reticule and go sedately up to the apartment in the Avenue Victor Hugo. Her life was full and overflowing. Occasionally Gerome would bring one of his fellow-officers and his wife to dine, and sometimes these visits were returned.

So the days slipped by, peacefully, calmly, each filled with more happiness than Marie ever dreamed life could hold.

Then into this peaceful, contented atmosphere, gradually, imperceptibly, out of the nowhere, vague

rumors began to shape themselves. A curious palpitating unrest made itself felt. The air seemed charged with something strange, alive, too formless to guess at, until one momentous day, that was to stand forever a grim milestone in the world's history. The papers were full of a terrible happening. The Austrian Arckduke had been assassinated, a shot had been fired at the royal carriage in a far-away country. Through the Paris streets, the news was cried.

Intangible menace seemed to quiver in the air, filling the heart with vague apprehensions of coming danger, like the glare of a great conflagration that is seen on the far horizon.

When she questioned her husband, he quieted her fears, though his own brow was anxious. This was all too remote, it would never come near enough to destroy.

There were long discussions over the little dining-table when the Le Grands or any of Gerome's fellow officers came to dine. She heard her own Austria discussed unfavorably. She wondered that Germany, whom she had always been brought up to look upon as the Great Protector, should here be viewed as the Arch-Conspirator, the Menacing Tyrant, bloodthirstily eager to get the whole world in the grip of its mailed fist.

Looking at her husband's uniform, it was brought home to her, with a gasping fear, what war might mean to her. But Gerome, seeing the look in her eyes, would reach across the table and pat her hand, and Monsieur Le Grand would rumble his assurances that

everything would surely blow over, Germany was too wise to set all Europe against her.

And then the distant conflagration seemed to grow clearer. It was as though the bright tongues of flame one had only imagined, became suddenly visible, leaping, advancing, devouring everything in their course.

The formless something that had palpitated in the air, took shape, and began to spell out the dread word, "WAR."

Every hour extras came out with news. Every hour it was denied.

From the windows of the little apartment in the Avenue d'Antin, Marie, with a white face, stood at Gerome's shoulder, watching the bonfires blazing where the police were burning the false newspapers.

"What does it all mean?" she shuddered. "What can it all mean?"

Gerome held her close.

"It may mean dreadful things, dear, we can only wait and see," he told her.

She was frightened every moment he was away from her, though the Avenue d'Antin was quiet and peaceful. On her way to visit the Le Grands, she had seen the huge placards posted along the Boulevards ordering the men to the *casernes*.

Gerome was with his regiment nearly always now, and she was much alone. Terror of what it might mean, fear of she knew not what, enveloped her. Here and there, she was beginning to hear the street gamins shout out their hatred of the *Boches*. Once or twice they had called the name at her. She began

to fancy she could even see in the kindly faces of her cousins a certain resentment of her origin.

Once she had spoken to Fleurette in German, and the girl had raised her arm as though warding off a blow.

"Don't speak that language," she had cried, and Marie, white-faced and wide-eyed, had looked into their serious faces, terror-stricken.

It couldn't be true! There couldn't be war! To-day, when mankind had grown so civilized, so filled with a sense of culture as she had heard it preached, it couldn't be true! The Fatherland, her Austria, and the country she had made her own? It was too horrible, too terrible to think of, it couldn't be! These weren't the days of the dark ages! This was the enlightened twentieth century! It would all blow over! It must!

Gerome soothed her.

"Marie, dear," he said seriously, "we are on the edge of grave things. I am not asking you to give up your love for your home land, but your allegiance belongs here now. We must be very careful. Everywhere there is suspicion, distrust of those who are not of our own blood. We must be very cautious."

Marie threw herself into his arms, frightened at his gravity.

"Nothing matters but you," she said; "nothing! There won't be war! There can't be! Nothing shall take you away from me!"

Her husband shook his head sadly above her trembling shoulders.

"Poor little one," he sighed, "there shouldn't be

war! But there may be. We must all do our best, whatever comes!"

A few days later, came a wild letter from Paulette.

"What is Paris saying?" it began. "What is Paris doing? Are we to let our country be overrun? Our beloved France insulted, reviled? Papa is drilling men every day here at the *caserne*, and Maurice is at home in Belgium now, but he will come as soon as France needs him and fight for the flag he loves almost as well as his own. *Maman*, too, is busy teaching the peasants what to do in case of the worst. Robert, the butler, has left to enlist if he is needed, and we have a new man. He is over age, they do not need him to fight. He seems very good. Even old Nanine is going to send her three sons. Oh, Gerome, my brother, I wish I were a man, so that I could go with you and fight for France if she needs me." And then in a paragraph all by itself had followed the line: "What about Marie—is she one of us?"

Marie looked up startled from the letter Gerome had handed her.

Paulette's vague distrust was voiced now. She was an alien, an enemy. She seemed to hear the cries of the street gamins, "*yah! Boche!*" To her there was neither France nor Germany, peace nor war. There was only Gerome, her husband. He was her world, her all, without him, Chaos! It was all a horrible nightmare; such things did not happen to-day. Husbands would not leave wives who loved them, to fight husbands of other wives who loved them equally well. They were living in a civilized world, a world that

had outlived the horrors of Barbarian times. Such things did not happen!

* * * * * * *

And then the sun had risen on the fourth of August and Belgium lay ravished and bleeding. The world rocked and groaned and was torn asunder. The skies thundered to the echo and re-echo of devastating guns. One after another, the nations shook off the security of peace, girded themselves in the red garb of war, and clashed their shields one on the other. Such things *did* happen! Civilization had perished!

France was called to arms. France was responding with all the joyousness, the brilliancy with which she had lived in peace. France was lifting her proud head, her brave, indomitable spirit against that ever-advancing gray wall of deadliness, that gray wall that for forty years, had builded and prepared itself, had seen that no chink or cranny should be left in it when The Day arrived. And against this menace, as it came closer and closer, France, pitifully unprepared, unexpectedly called from her playtime, was taking her stand, brave and full of the courage of the right that knows no defeat.

Everywhere was the sound of the Marseillaise, the tramp of marching feet. Marie went with the Le Grands to watch the soldiers pass along the Champs Elysées. The music of the band, as they swung along, the fluttering tri-color that caught the sunlight, the eager glow of patriotism shining from each young face as it swept by, tightened her throat, misted her eyes, and she found herself forgetting that

they were marching against her own people, her own Fatherland.

She saw herself in each mother, each wife, each sweetheart, trudging along by the side of the swinging troops. She felt her own heart bleed with these weeping ones, sending their best to fight for what they loved more, La Patrie! When she could bear it no longer, she turned with streaming eyes and begged Fleurette and Sidonie to take her home.

Gerome was not to leave yet, he had other work to do; but she knew the day was not far distant when she would be sending him out as those other mothers, wives and sweethearts were doing.

The days swept on into those terrible ones, when all Paris waited anxiously for the result of the battles being waged, when all Paris shuddered with the approach of invading feet. Breathless excitement, wild joy at the reports of victory, of the foe vanquished, ran like wild-fire through the streets. Then followed those other rumors, alarming, terrible, later confirmed by official reports. The Army was falling back! The Enemy was advancing!

Gerome was with her less and less now. Marie kept safely hidden in her little apartment. When he came home, it was only for hurried, brief visits, assurances that he would see to her safety, but that his place and duty was with his regiment which had been detailed to guard the city.

One morning, Marie was awakened by an ominous rumbling, far away, deep-toned and menacing.

Suzanne ran in trembling with fright.

"Madame," she gasped, "it is the guns! Do you not hear them?"

She went to the window and looked down into the street. People ran past, terrified, shouting that the city would be taken. She saw some of her neighbors leave their houses, with only such of their belongings as they could conveniently carry with them.

Toward noon, the Le Grands came, dressed for traveling, Madame's eyes were red with weeping, and the two girls whimpered like frightened babies. Monsieur, his swarthy face yellowish from a long night of vigil and the knowledge of what this might mean to Paris, bade Marie pack a few things and come with them.

"We are leaving for Bordeaux," he said. "The Government has been moved there. I go with my office. You must come with us, Marie, you will be safer there."

Marie stared from one to the other, frightened.

"How can I go," she said. "Gerome is with his regiment at the Fortifications. He bade me stay here, close, indoors."

Nothing could move her, and weeping bitterly, the girls clinging about her neck, and Madame kissing her sadly, they said good-bye.

The cloud that hung over everything deepened, grew blacker. Terror, horror, and a dreadful sorrow stalked the streets. Defeat was approaching, defeat by a foe who had once before marched triumphantly down these broad avenues, under these stately arches built as the memorial of a proudly victorious nation. Men and women stopped each

other in the streets, asking if this were going to happen again.

Invasion, and all that it meant, hung like a black pall over the city called the gayest, the happiest in the world, covering, enveloping it with a dreadful menace.

A tragic figure, Paris waited its doom.

Then, suddenly, across the blackness came a message. The enemy was halted. Louder roared the guns, but now, those who listened seemed to hear a note of triumph in their fierce song, a shout that bade them look up, take courage! It was as though the spirit of Jeanne d'Arc had again raised the Oriflamme.

La Patrie lifted her head once more. Bloody, wounded, but proudly undaunted.

Another message! The enemy was retiring!

The flower of France was sweeping onward! Onward! The tide had turned!

Through the streets, the people sang, shouted, wild with joy.

A little stream had marked the high tide of French patriotism and valor; a little stream that would live in the memory of men as long as deeds like these should be written or sung; a little stream which would be forever after endeared to the hearts and the minds of the French nation—the Marne!

CHAPTER XIX

In ghastly numbers, the wounded began pouring into Paris, a sad and terrible procession. About the railroad stations, crowds were gathered. Mothers, sisters, wives, sweethearts were anxiously scanning each pitiful burden as it was lifted into the waiting ambulances, their hearts torn with the fear that this might be the one they sought. Strong men shook with anguish at the terrible spectacle. These shattered wrecks, who had gone forth in the pride of their youth and strength, fought, suffered, died, so that Liberty might live, their wounds mutely supplicating those who were to take their places not to let their sacrifice be in vain.

As the stretchers were tenderly borne past the waiting people, flowers were flung on the gray blankets, there were cheers and suppressed sobs. But mingling with their tears was a feeling of exultant pride that these man had saved their beloved country from the humiliation of defeat, had kept hope still alive for final victory.

The women of France, those wonderful women who have always risen to every crisis in their country's history flocked to give their services to her now.

With Gerome's permission, Marie offered her aid. Her hands were deft and light, and her heart was full of pity for these poor boys whom she had seen march away so bravely, young, strong, and flushed with the glow of eager patriotism. She was filled with com-

passion for these people of whom her marriage had made her one, and she worked early and late among them. The fatigue that followed acted as a sort of relief against the terrible anxiety with which she was filled as to Gerome's safety, for now she never knew where he was nor into what danger he was going.

As an assistant nurse, she spent most of her time in the hospitals, going from bed to bed, comforting, consoling, doing as much as her limited training would permit. Her heart bled for the sightless eyes that had so recently smiled back the sunlight; for the useless stumps of arms that could never again hold those they loved; for the helpless young giants shorn of their strength forever. As she went in and out among the terrible flotsam tossed back by the tide of battle, a wondering admiration for the people of her adoption grew in her heart, for torn and racked, bloody and shattered as they were, these men never complained, there was never a word of discouragement. Stronger than their suffering, stronger than the thought of the helpless years ahead, was the joy born of the knowledge that they had fought well and bravely for what they loved most—La Patrie!

There was more than enough to do for all who were willing to lend their aid. Marie's heart was wholly in her work, she toiled unremittingly. She tried to comfort those among her acquaintances whose dear ones lay out beneath the little wooden crosses near the Marne.

But although in the hospitals her gentle hand and sweet face brought comfort to many a pain-racked

poilu, gradually among her own circle she seemed to sense a widening breach, a rift in the love and companionship that had always been given her.

One day she overheard Fleurette and Sidonie discussing her.

"Marie is different," said the older, "she isn't really one of the *Boches*, she belongs to us!"

"She was born there," the other had responded doggedly, "and I heard papa say yesterday, 'Once a German, always a German!'"

She went into their room immediately, and carefully explained to them that all her love and allegiance was with them; that she had given up her own country with her marriage to Gerome, and was now as loyally French as they.

But the tales of brutality, of wanton destruction that were reported in Paris, the cruelty of these people from whom she had sprung, were inconceivable to her. She couldn't believe them. Once she voiced these doubts to Gerome.

He put his hands on her shoulders and looked deep into her eyes.

"Dearest," he said, "I'm afraid these things are true. It will be best for you to believe them, and to forget that the blood of our enemies flows in your veins!"

Once on her way home, she had seen an angry mob stoning the windows of Herr Pappenheim's *Rotisserie*. Through the door she caught a glimpse of the round face of the proprietor. It was a pasty-white, and there was a swollen lump over one eye where a stone had struck him. The windows were smashed

and yelling boys were pillaging among the appetizing stores.

She heard the derisive shouts of "*Boches—yah, sale Boche,*" as the *gendarmes* dispersed the crowd.

Good Herr Pappenheim, who had so often winked at a generous overweight for some needy customer, and in the warm evenings had always sat happily on the sidewalk before his shop, his fat German wife at his side, and all the children in the neighborhood climbing over his broad, good-humored shoulders! And now, with this new feeling against his race, these same children were stoning his windows!

The return of the government to Paris brought the Le Grands with it. Julie came with a note to the Avenue d'Antin.

"Dear Marie," it said, "we are home again. We shall be very glad to see you when you can spare the time!"

"Spare the time," she looked up startled. The formal phrasing worried her. Were they too, thinking of her as The Enemy?

"They don't trust me," she complained to Gerome on one of his fleeting visits to her. "They look at me as though I am some strange creature that doesn't belong here. They—they whisper about me. Yesterday, at the Red Cross rooms, I heard Madame Dupin say I was an alien, and—and once or twice they spoke about—about *spies!*"

Gerome, weary with his long vigil and happy to be with her again, drew her close in his arms.

"Dearest," he murmured, "I know it must be very hard for you. This sort of thing is one of the worst

phases of this war. But you are one of us now! It is because you are a part of my beloved France, that She means more to me than ever."

Marie nestled closer, her cheek against his brown one.

"I *am* a part of France, dear, now and forever!"

She felt her words deeply, with a sense of elation in the knowledge that she did belong to this wonderful country whose children could sing their way happily through the sunlit days of peace, and yet when the sky grew overcast with war clouds that obscured the sun and threatened to overwhelm her with destruction, be ready to lay aside their playthings, turn from their laughter and ease, and girding on their armor, stand staunch and firm, fighting to the last drop of their heart's blood.

In the faces about her, she read the exaltation that must have lighted the countenance of the Maid of Orleans, the determination that the proud head of their beloved country should never be bowed beneath a strange yoke.

She forgot Austria, forgot Germany, forgot her alien blood, and gave her waking hours gladly, unreservedly to be as useful as she could.

After the supply of trained nurses increased she was set to making surgical dressings, and, as she rolled the interminable yards of gauze, the room would sometimes blur through her tears of sympathy at the sad stories she heard. But as more and more of the terribly wounded kept pouring into the city, the hatred and resentment against the enemy who was causing all this suffering grew, and she began

to see a difference in the faces about her. Women who had been kind and friendly before, who had politely ignored her foreign origin, now began openly to show their disfavor.

Sometimes when she entered the room filled with women busy preparing supplies for the hospitals, there would be a sudden cessation of conversation, as though she had been the subject they were discussing.

As the days wore on, suspicion and distrust became more open, friends of the Le Grands who knew her origin, cut her as they passed her in the street, and even her cousins asked her less and less to the apartment in the Avenue Victor Hugo.

Marie's sensitive nature shrank from the aversion about her. She suffered keenly from the suspicion directed against her. So at last it was decided that she would be safer at the Château de la Motte than here in Paris where she must of necessity be so much alone. Tearfully, she closed the little apartment and prepared to go to her husband's people.

CHAPTER XX

To Paulette, the fourth of August meant the sudden ending of all her happy anticipations, for, shortly after the declaration of war, Maurice had been taken prisoner.

When the news came to the château, she refused to believe it; such a thing was impossible! Maurice was to fare forth and fight for France, he was to fly her colors from his helmet as did the knights of old! But he had been obliged to fight the invaders of his own country. The Germans had come! The Germans had conquered! Maurice was a prisoner!

Paulette had never known in all her short life what denial meant. To her parents, her word and whim was law, and her brother idolized her. Her every wish had been gratified. She insisted now that they demand her lover's freedom. She could not be made to understand the futility of even asking. It was impossible that what she wanted so ardently, should be kept from her.

There came a letter, meagre, bloodless, sternly emasculated by the Teuton censor, but it contained one word that sent the blood from her lips—"Wounded." Other letters followed, but they were pitifully empty, so lacking in everything that she wanted to know, that they were more a source of grief than comfort. After awhile, even these stopped.

Old Nanine, the Breton woman, who had nursed

Paulette and her brother, shook her head over the shadows under her eyes, the listless droop of her mouth, the hollows in the delicate oval of her cheeks.

The girl was filled with a flame of deep, bitter rage that consumed her day and night. The tears that came to the relief of other women, were denied her. Hate, that most terrible of the children of War, was born in her breast.

"Now dearie," crooned Nanine, "don't take it like that! It can't be long before the French will have driven the *Boches* away, and the young Monsieur will be back again. Come, calm yourself! What a picture you will be for him to see when he comes, if you go on so."

But Paulette refused to be comforted. The sunniness of her nature changed into a brooding sullenness. She grew to hate the very name of the Germans, and little by little her resentment fastened itself on Marie, her Austrian sister-in-law.

In the midst of her grief and despair, one day one of her school friends, a girl of her own age, came to the château. She wore the white coif of the trained nurse with its little red cross of mercy bound about her forehead. She was filled with wonderful tales of bravery and suffering, and in a flash Paulette knew that this was the work which would fill her time and her heart while waiting for Maurice, and perhaps enable her to help him. She began to dream that it might be her hands that would nurse him back to health. She must make those hands as skillful as possible. She threw herself into the necessary studies with feverish energy.

Though the General had passed the retiring age, he had been recalled to active service and was absent most of the time. When he did come home, it was only for hurried visits. The household was completely changed. One by one, those of the men servants who were young enough, had been called to the colors and had marched away. Old Nanine had seen her two eldest sons go, big, strapping fellows of whom she was justly proud. In company with so many other French mothers, she had said good-bye to them for the last time. Jean had fallen in one of the first skirmishes and Pierre had received his death wound a few weeks later. Now the youngest, Jacques, had just left for the front. Her heart was very heavy, but she stifled her own sorrow to comfort the grieving Paulette.

Madame de la Motte busied herself from early morning to night, gathering supplies and looking after the families of those who had gone with the army.

Of the men about the château, none were left excepting Joseph, the gardener, stooping under his sixty heavy years, and the new butler.

This man was tall and thin, perhaps forty-five, his hair graying at the temples, his dark, watchful eyes looking out steadily from under heavy brows. He was so well spoken of in the letters of recommendation which he presented, that Madame de la Motte considered herself fortunate to have found him.

Antoine—this was his name—and old Nanine, did not agree very well. The Breton peasant distrusted and disliked every one whose ancestry she did not

know. Her broad, good-humored face would set in wooden lines when she and Antoine encountered one another, and if he took her to task about even the smallest thing, she would shower upon him a volley of sturdy Breton abuse. So usually the mild and quiet-spoken Antoine avoided her as much as possible.

Nanine was a privileged character. She came and went as she pleased in the household, although her own home was the gate house just at the entrance to the château grounds. Here she lived, with an orphan girl named Angéle, who was to marry Jacques when he came back from the war.

To this cottage of Nanine's, Paulette came nearly every day. She brought her letters as she received them from Maurice, and the two girls would read them over and over, Angéle pointing out where the censor had blotted out a phrase, Paulette, through her tears, trying to supply it. And Jacques' letters were gone over in the same way. When the news came that he, too, was taken prisoner and sent to Belgium, they spent much of their time hoping that he would be near Maurice, and so these two girls, one at each end of the social scale, bridged the gap that separated them and became one in a sorrow common to both. For grief, as well as war, knows no caste.

Old Nanine, her wide Breton skirts billowing about her, the huge wings of her great white Breton cap framing her broad face, trudged back and forth with Paulette on her errands among the peasants, her heart heavy with the sorrow that comes to every mother of men, when men are waging war. She would

not trust the girl alone on her own familiar roads, for the armies were nearing their quiet village.

So the days went by, those dreadful August days. Into almost every household about them came the sad news that some loved son who had marched away so bravely, would never return. The faces of the women grew wan and sad. Joy had gone from the world.

And now the air began to tremble with an ominous intonation, a sound filled with grim menace that continued day and night, a harbinger of death and destruction, of devastation and terror. A sound that was never to cease in the long months that followed, sometimes swelling into a deep, distant roar, sometimes dying away in a dull, intermittent muttering.

It was the voice of the guns!

CHAPTER XXI

One day there came a letter from Gerome.

"I am bringing my wife to stay with you," it said. "Paris is growing uncomfortable for her, for though she is as loyal as I am myself, there are those who are unkind because of her foreign birth. I have leave of absence, as I have important business to talk over with you, my father, and so when I leave for the front, I shall know that Marie is in the care of my mother and Paulette. We shall motor from here sometime on Wednesday, and will probably be with you Thursday evening. Until then——" and the letter ended with the loving messages Gerome always sent his parents, for he was a devoted son.

The General, home for a few days, read the letter aloud, Madame closed her eyes quickly for a moment, to hide the sudden mist that rose to them.

"I shall see my boy again," she said softly, but Paulette, her face sullen, sat staring into space.

"It seems a long while since we saw him," said the General, folding the letter, and putting it back into his breast pocket, "and he must be off again almost at once!"

His wife sighed wistfully.

"We must be grateful that we are to see even this much of our son. How many of our friends will never see theirs again!"

Paulette swung about almost fiercely.

"It isn't only death that keeps them away! Think of the prisoners! Oh, I wish I were a man! To have to sit here idly and wait, is maddening!"

She had finished her training and was daily expecting her commission as a qualified nurse. The inaction, the waiting, was wearing her already suffering nerves to a wire edge.

Her mother cast a quick glance at the General and reaching over, put a gentle hand on the girl's arm.

"Dear child," she began, but Paulette went on almost fiercely.

"Sometimes I feel as though I shall go mad thinking of Maurice, a prisoner in some filthy place, suffering from his wound, with perhaps not even enough to eat!" She bowed her head on the arm of her chair and began weeping bitterly.

The General, helpless as so many men are in the sight of a woman's suffering, paced the room with long, military steps, his hands clutching each other behind his back, his lower lip pursed out under his mustache.

Madame tried to comfort the weeping girl.

"Paulette," she said, "you must be calm, your brother and Marie will arrive at any moment."

The girl sprang to her feet, her eyes flashing, her lips drawn back from her white teeth.

"Why did Gerome ever marry her?" she cried. "Why do we have to have her with us?"

"Paulette," chided her mother, "she is your brother's wife."

The General stopped a moment in his pacing.

"He returns to the front to-morrow," he said.

"She must not be left unprotected. It is not her fault that she was born on the other side."

But the girl's pent-up emotion would have expression.

"Who was she?" she demanded. "What was she? We know nothing of her, nothing, excepting that she came from Vienna, and God knows, we have no cause to love anyone who comes from there!"

"Paulette," sighed her mother, "you hurt me, dear, when you talk like that"; and the General added, stern for the first time in his life to this beloved child of his: "Paulette, you must promise me you will be kind to your brother's wife."

The girl still faced them defiantly, her breast heaving with the sobs she was trying to repress.

"How can I?" she cried. "How can I bear any good will to one of those fiends who are responsible for all the suffering of Maurice, for all this terrible agony!"

Madame's eyes were misty as she looked into the drawn face which for the moment, rage had robbed of all its charm.

"Dear child," she said softly, "Marie is not to blame."

"She is, she is, I hate her!" and sobbing hysterically, Paulette turned and ran from the room.

The General shook his head sadly as he looked after her.

"One of the terrible evils of war," he said, "is that it engenders hatred and prejudice that live for generations after the war is over."

He paced the room thoughtfully. Now and then

he let his eyes rest fondly on Madame as she bent over her knitting. The quiet, the air of peace that seemed to surround them was in sharp contrast to the distant rumbling where war's savage work was going on.

He had spent his days after retiring from the army, here at his château, cultivating its lands, planting his vineyards, receiving from life what was to him its most treasured possession, peace and contentment.

When the children grew up, and Gerome, following his father's career, entered the army, the General revived his youth in his son's letters, while Madame watching Paulette's romance grow and ripen, relived her own love story.

They were the spirit of that people whose civilization had been measured by the hearth and roof-tree, whose love of the home was the nucleus of that impassible barrier which had opposed the Romans and beaten back Attilla's advancing hordes, and who, now that the enemy was again clamoring at their gates, were prepared to prove that the spirit of their fathers' still lived and would fight to the last drop of their blood to preserve that most sacred thing in the hearts of all people—Home!

CHAPTER XXII

PAULETTE, when she left her parents, threw a scarf about her shoulders and ran across the courtyard to the gate house. She longed for the sympathetic love of old Nanine, on whose bosom she had always found consolation.

The long summer twilight was graying off into night, and the tall black poplars above the garden wall showed black against the darkening sky. From the low window, thrown open to the soft night air, came a yellow shaft of lamp-light that lay in a square patch on the neat gravel walk.

As Paulette's small heels crunched against the pebbles, a figure suddenly started out of the shadows and a man's voice called softly:

"Who comes?"

The girl drew back, startled.

"It is I, Paulette," she answered. He came closer and Paulette stared unbelievingly into his face.

"Jacques!" she cried.

"Yes, Mam'selle," answered the man, grinning broadly, "from Belgium—from prison!"

The girl gave a quick gasp.

"Captain le Cerf—what of him?"

"I have news of him, Mam'selle, but I must report to the General first!"

Paulette swayed, and put out her hand to steady herself against the wall.

"Maurice!" she whispered the name under her

breath as though half afraid of what the news might be. "Tell me! Quick!" but Jacques shook his head stolidly.

"First the General," he said, and turning on his heel, started toward the house.

There was nothing for her to do but follow. At the door he stood aside to let her pass.

"Will you tell your father I am here, Mam'selle?" he asked.

She looked at him piteously.

"Give me my news," she begged.

"What I have to say must be said to the General, Mam'selle," and Paulette, the daughter of a soldier, knew he was right. But she was trembling and breathless when she opened the salon door.

Her mother was still sitting as she had left her in the chair near the table, her hands in her lap, the lamp-light accentuating the silver of her hair. Her eyes were closed and there were weary shadows under them.

The girl went softly to her side and laid a loving hand on her shoulder. The knowledge that she soon was to have news of Maurice, had softened her heart for a moment, and driven out the bitterness she felt.

Madame opened her eyes with a start.

The girl's cheeks were flushed, the hand on her mother's shoulder shook. Madame looked at her apprehensively.

"What is it!" she asked. These were days when the most insignificant happenings might have the direst foreboding.

"Jacques is back! He is in the hall. He is waiting to see father!"

Madame rose hastily to her feet.

"Jacques? Is it possible?"

"It is, mother! He is here! He has news of Maurice!"

At the sound of her excited voice, the General opened the door of his study.

Paulette waited for no more than the question in his eyes.

"Jacques is here," she cried, "he is waiting to see you! Oh, father, ask him quickly his news from Maurice!"

The General looked from one to the other in surprise as the boy entered and stood at attention.

The girl clung to her father's arm, and Madame smiled kindly.

"I understand you were a prisoner," began the General.

In the full light of the lamp, they could see how loosely the young soldier's dusty uniform hung on his square shoulders. The skin across his cheek-bones was tightly stretched, and there were lines about his mouth that must have come from suffering. His chin was blue with a week's growth of beard.

"I have a message from Captain le Cerf," he said.

Paulette clung to her father's arm, trembling with expectation.

"What is it?" asked the General patting the shaking hand reassuringly.

"It's a long story, Monsieur."

"Tell it in your own way, then," he said, motioning him to a chair.

Jacques seated himself stiffly, and began.

"We were prisoners in the same camp! It was just outside Liège. Soon after I got there, I saw the Captain. He had been wounded."

Paulette, her eyes black and burning in her white face, followed every word with pitiful eagerness.

"I was given permission to take care of him. There was an English nurse there. She was very kind to the prisoners. She told us how it would be possible for some of us to get away. We made our plans, and yesterday, two others and myself got across the border. The Captain would have come also if he had been strong enough, but he will be here soon," he hastened to add, when he saw the look in the girl's eyes, "and when it has all been arranged, a message will be sent to Division Headquarters at St. Quentin, giving the name of the town and the time when he will reach the frontier."

Paulette was shaking with emotion.

"Escape!" she breathed. "If he only can!"

What a vindication of her pride in Maurice this would be. To escape, to show the Germans how futile their efforts were to hold him. Her eyes sparkled and the blood surged to her cheeks. To trick the hated enemy that held him, what a triumph!

Then she thought of his wound, and her momentary elation left her. Fear returned.

"Is he better? Are you sure he is better?"

"Yes, Mam'selle, or I would not have left him!"

Madame rose.

"I must tell Nanine," she said, "that her son is here!" She rang, and after a brief interval came the old woman's knock.

For a moment, the Breton peasant woman stood facing them, then with a glad cry, she stumbled toward the young soldier.

"Jacques," she cried, and the joy and love in her voice brought a lump into the boy's throat.

"Mother," he said huskily, as she rocked him in her stout old arms, "Mother!"

Nanine was oblivious of the presence of the others. She was the first mother, the primeval woman with her child. The maternal love that goes out alike from high and low, from civilized and savage, was in her voice and eyes.

Presently she held him away from her.

"I knew they couldn't keep you," she said fondly. "I knew you'd find your way back to me. Are you well? Did they give you enough to eat?" she turned to the others. "He always wanted such a lot to eat!"

Jacques grinned sheepishly. His mates too, had found this out.

Paulette broke in eagerly.

"Tell me about Captain le Cerf, was he comfortable? Were they kind to him?"

The old woman looked at her, surprised.

"What are you saying, Mam'selle? Did the good Lord bring them together?"

Jacques nodded and turned to the General.

"We were all well treated. The hardest part was not getting any news. They told us things were going against us, but we knew they were lying."

His mother's eyes devoured him.

"How were you taken?" asked the General.

"Four others and myself were detailed one night to cut some barbed wire. Their star-shells discovered us to the *Boches*. Three of our men went down, the other and myself were captured and taken to a prison camp in Belgium. Among the prisoners the men and officers are kept separated, but one day when I was doing some of the work they had set me at, I recognized Captain le Cerf as he passed near me with a hospital orderly. I suppose you've heard that he was taken in the first attack on Liège. He'd been in the hospital a long time when I got there, as his wound had been serious. You will be glad to know, my General, that in Belgium there is a band of men and women whose good work it is to try and smuggle French prisoners and their own men of military age, out of the country. There's an English nurse—one of God's angels we call her—who is at the head of this band. She's helped a lot of us. But you see, when it came to Captain le Cerf's turn to be helped to escape, he was still so weak it was impossible for him to make the attempt. I was next, so it was arranged that if I got through the lines, I was to bring you word that you might expect him. They're going to get him across as soon as they can!"

"When—where?" broke in Paulette.

"That I cannot tell, Mam'selle. The next man that is passed through will know the exact time and place where Captain le Cerf will reach our lines!"

"Good!" said the General. "Now tell us how you made your own escape." And Jacques, a little ner-

vously, though proud of his momentary importance, launched into his story.

"This English nurse was to give me all the particulars, but so that I could get near her, I had to be in the hospital, and I'm a pretty healthy man," his shoulders squared a little. "I was given some medicine and told to take it and pretend to be sick." He made a wry face at the memory. "I didn't have to pretend. They got me to the hospital, and while their doctor was near, my nurse was just like any other nurse, but as soon as he left, she leaned over me and whispered my instructions. You know, sir, that the nurses have to report all deaths; well, I was to die—and when I came to again, she'd have a *Boche* driver's uniform ready for me. That night they smuggled me out. As far as those *Boches* know, I'm lying out under one of their little crosses. I reported where I was told to, as an ambulance driver. My uniform and accent were unquestioned, and I was put in charge of an ambulance and detailed to pick up the wounded. A man can feel as sorry for a wounded *Boche* as for one of his own, and an ambulance driver sees a lot of suffering. I had to make many trips before the time came when our *Poilus* came charging across No Man's Land. I was in the front trench with my stretcher-bearer at the time. When I saw our men coming, I pretended to be wounded, and dropped. They took the trench. I tore off as much of the field gray as I could and told them who I was. I was ordered to report to my own regiment, and my commanding officer sent me here!" Jacques told his story with the simple directness of the man whose life is action, not words.

Paulette had followed eagerly. Her mother's eyes were wet as she listened. Old Nanine, her ample bosom rising and falling with the breathless wonder that this son, who was still a child to her, had come through so much, murmured half aloud, a little prayer of thanks for his safety.

The General nodded his approval.

"Good!" he said. "Report yourself to Colonel Rambeau at St. Quentin. Tell him when word comes from Captain le Cerf, that my orders are that you are to bring it here immediately. Be careful with it, it is important that it does not get into other hands."

Jacques saluted.

"I shall leave word that you may come directly to Mademoiselle," continued the General, smiling indulgently on his daughter. "That is all."

"Nanine," said Madame, rising, "you must want to talk to your boy."

As the mother and son hurried along the path to the gate house, the door opened, and Angéle appeared in the shaft of a light that poured out.

For a moment she stood and watched them, and then with a cry, ran and threw her arms wildly about the boy's neck.

Nanine turned with a sigh and went into the house, leaving the girl to sob in her sweetheart's arms, and it was some time before she called:

"Come in, Jacques is hungry!"

CHAPTER XXIII

After the door had closed on Nanine and her son, the General patted the brown head resting on his shoulder.

"Isn't it glorious news, Paulette?"

"It's wonderful how cheaply these men hold their lives," Madame said musingly. "Chances that would have seemed madness in normal times have now become part of the day's work."

Paulette nestled closer in her father's arms. "If he only reaches the frontier safely," she murmured, "if he only is not discovered and taken back."

Madame's face was sad as she comforted the girl. Her own sorrow and foreboding were kept close shut in her heart. But self-command is measured by those rare occasions when the evidence of inward struggle is seen through the cloak of restraint. Something of what she felt, shook for a moment her outward calm, trembled in her voice, shone through the sudden mist in her eyes.

"Poor *Maman*," said Paulette, "you have so much to think of! I have been a selfish little beast!"

The gilt clock on the mantle chimed out nine. It would soon be time for Gerome to arrive. She remembered with what happiness she had always looked forward to his visits, their days of comradeship. Now all this was to be changed. She knew she was unjust. But still there lingered in her heart the resentment against this stranger whom she instinctively distrusted. If her brother might only

have been coming alone. All his time must now be given to this woman of alien blood. She knew she was unjust, that she had no grounds on which to base her dislike, excepting the fact that she belonged to a nation which was at war with her own. Her thoughts were interrupted by the honking of a motor-horn, and the swift-following sounds of clutching brakes and mingling voices.

"Here they come now," she cried, her anger and bitterness against Marie, which she had tried to crush, surging back.

Madame rose to her feet.

"Ring for Antoine to get their bags," she said quickly.

Paulette pulled the old-fashioned bell rope that hung by the mantle, and then turned and stood staring sullenly into the fire.

The General hurried to the long windows and threw them open. He could see the white light of the motor lamps cutting a path through the darkness. Gerome's voice, as he gave orders to the chauffeur, came to him clearly, and presently he saw him come swinging along the terrace, the light from the window brightening the colors of his uniform. Marie, swathed in motor veils and wrapped in a heavy coat, clung to his arm. The lamp light silhouetted the General's fine figure and Gerome called gayly as he saw him.

"Here we are, father!" and he stood aside to let Marie enter.

For a moment she stood in the window, almost afraid to venture in. All the way from Paris, she had

been torturing herself with the thought of how her husband's people would receive her, how much they would let the knowledge of her enemy blood mar their love for her. She looked about her apprehensively, but the General's kind voice dispelled her fears.

"My daughter," he said as he led her in, "welcome home!"

Marie threw back her veils, their soft gray framing her sweet face and golden bands of hair.

"My dear," said Madame, "how happy we are to have you with us!"

"You are all so good to take me in," faltered the girl, her eyes full of tears. Gratefully, she looked from one to the other, and turning to Paulette, smiled wistfully into the handsome face, but Paulette's greeting was ungracious and perfunctory, and the smile died on Marie's lips.

Gerome's arm was about his mother's shoulders. She drew his head down to hers and kissed him tenderly, and then turned to his wife.

"Come dear, rest here," she said with sweet hospitality. "You must be tired after your long ride from Paris."

Marie sank into the chair the General brought forward for her.

"There has been so much to weary me," she sighed.

"Yes, dear, we all realize that, and each of us, in his own way, has tried to lighten the burden," and Madame helped the girl unfasten her wraps.

"It is good to be here," Marie looked about her gratefully, "it's—it's almost like peace again."

"I knew you would be happy," said Gerome,

coming over and sitting on the arm of her chair. "I told you they would be glad to have you with them."

The General beamed upon her. In the code of the gallant old soldier, a pretty woman was meant to be taken care of.

"We will do our best to make you feel at home with us," he assured her.

"And to make you happy," added Madame; but at her words, Marie broke down.

"Happy?" she sobbed, "how can I be happy? He is going away to-morrow."

Gerome turned helplessly to his mother.

"What can I do for her?" he asked.

"Come, come," and the General patted Marie's hand, "we each have our part to do, my child," and then for the first time, Paulette joined in the conversation.

"You are not the only one who is sending some one to fight the enemy." She flung the word at Marie as though it were her own name, and her sister-in-law cowered under it.

Gerome was angry. He had foreseen trouble with Paulette, but had hoped that the assurance of his wife's loyalty, would have banished all resentment.

"Paulette——!" he began, but his mother interrupted.

"Don't mind, dear," she said softly. "Paulette's heart is in Belgium. Maurice is still a prisoner."

Marie looked at her pityingly. She could understand. She remembered the young, laughing-eyed officer who had been so kind at her wedding. She remembered the happiness of these two young people,

and her heart bled for Paulette. But the girl looked at her defiantly, ignoring the pity in her eyes.

"They'll find they can't keep him!" she said so bitterly, that the General hastened to break in.

"I'll ring for Antoine to help you with your bags."

He was about to pull the bell-rope, when the door opened and the butler stood on the threshold. His thin shoulders stooped slightly with characteristic deference.

At the sound of his voice, Marie felt a horrible fear gripping at her heart. Her throat seemed to tighten as though cold fingers clutched it. She turned slowly, the blood in her veins suddenly frozen, for the man standing in the doorway wearing the livery of a servant, the humility of a menial, was Von Pfaffen.

For a tense moment they faced one another. The man's eyes were like live coals in a face that was otherwise dead. Marie's hand went to her throat. There was such a look of terror in her face, that the attention of all was directed to her, and the butler's imperturbable mask, which for one swift moment had slipped aside, had time to adjust itself. He stood watching her closely, as the family gathered about, all solicitude.

"She is faint," cried Madame, "some water—quick!" but Marie motioned them away.

"No, no," she said breathlessly. "It is nothing! Thanks!" and by a supreme effort, she regained her self-control.

The butler was still standing in the doorway quietly waiting for his orders, his thin face set and expressionless.

"Get Madame's bags, Antoine," directed the General, and the man turned with a slight bow and left the room.

Gerome's eyes followed him.

"What has become of François?" he asked.

"François was young enough to be called," the General answered. "He left us a week ago."

"Antoine came to us highly recommended," Madame assured him, disturbed for a moment by the doubt in his eyes. "He is over age for the army, but seems an intelligent, faithful servant."

As she spoke, the man returned carrying the bags, and stood awaiting orders.

"Where are these to go, Madame?" he asked quietly, and at his voice, Marie again turned and stared into his face, like a bird that watches a snake.

The man paid no heed to her, however, but waited respectfully for Madame to answer.

"Put them in the East room, Antoine," she told him, and with a slight inclination of his head, he crossed the room and went out into the hall.

Marie's eyes followed him, her lips apart, her fingers tightly clenched.

Paulette, from her chair by the mantel, where she had subsided after the speech flung at her sister-in-law, watched her under sullen brows. She hated Germans. They couldn't make her like this one. She wouldn't!

As the door closed after Antoine, Marie gave a little gasp, and Madame, frightened, came to her side.

"Marie," she said, "are you ill?"

The girl's eyes were still on the door.

"I—I——" she began, and then turned piteously to her husband. "Oh, Gerome!"

The blow had come so suddenly, so unexpectedly. She felt as one stricken blind, groping in the dark. This man, here, where she had come for protection and shelter? Her mind could scarcely grasp the full horror of the situation. Waves of nausea passed over her, she was sick with unutterable terror. Was it possible they could not hear the wild beating of her heart, the voice of conscience crying her guilt? Surely those about her must have seen that she knew him! The security into which she had lulled herself, was shattered and fallen away. But why had he not recognized her? What mission had he here in this house? Oh, God, how was it to end? But her brain refused her further service. Her face grew white as marble, and her head fell on Gerome's shoulder.

He put his arm about her quickly.

"Marie, my darling, what is it? Mother, bring some cognac! Quick!"

Madame hurried for the decanter, the General bent over her, full of solicitude, even Paulette, stirred into action by Marie's helplessness, knelt at her side, and began chafing her wrists, her training as a nurse making her forget her resentment for the moment. As Gerome held the glass to his wife's lips, her blue eyes opened mistily.

"Dearest," he said anxiously. "What is it? Are you better?"

She roused herself with an effort.

"It's nothing—nothing; I'm all right now—I'm sorry—I suppose I was over-tired," and she leaned wearily against his shoulder.

"She has not been quite strong, lately," he explained, "she is nervous, worrying because I must return to the front to-night."

"To-night!" said his mother, startled, "so soon?"

"Yes, *ma mère*," he answered, smoothing his wife's golden hair tenderly; "but," and he turned to his father with a significant look, "I shall be here again in the morning."

The General pursed up his lips and tapped them with his forefinger.

"H'm," he said, "so I supposed—to-morrow—h'm!"

Gerome bent over his wife tenderly.

"Are you well enough to go to your room now, dear? I think you will feel better if you lie down!"

"Nanine will bring you some refreshments," added Madame.

Marie forced a smile to her stiff lips.

"You are very kind," she said. "I—I'll go directly. I'm quite well now. I'm sorry to have been so much trouble!"

Madame gently pressed her hand.

"My dear," she said, "it gives us pleasure to do all we can for you. You must rest and when you have recovered from your fatigue, here, in our wonderful country air, you will soon be yourself again!"

Gerome looked about the room. His mother's eyes smiled back into his. He had seen approval of Marie in the General's face when they had arrived, but Paulette was still unwon. What could he do to

overcome this dislike that his sister was making so apparent? He felt sure that if he were near, Paulette could soon be made to see her injustice, but he must leave Marie, and the thought troubled him. His arm tightened about the trembling girl.

"There is no other place where I could leave my little wife," he said. "You can't, any of you, know what she means to me!"

"When you made her your wife, you made her our daughter," said Madame graciously.

Gerome laid his cheek against his wife's, his eyes on Paulette.

"You and Marie must be great friends, little sister," he said; but Paulette shrugged sullenly, and Marie hastily broke in:

"She is unhappy, dear, because her sweetheart is a prisoner."

The last word whipped Paulette's resentment again. She would take no pity from an enemy.

"A prisoner," she repeated, "held by the Germans," and she swung about angrily; "but he's going to get away, he's coming back to me in spite of them!"

"Paulette!" the General was stern, "I must beg of you——" and Madame turned to Gerome in apology.

"She is unhappy, dear," she explained.

Marie lifted her head from Gerome's shoulder and drew away from his arms.

"I can understand, I know what you are suffering," she said tensely. "If Gerome were in the position of Maurice, if he were forcibly withheld from me, I would hate, as you do, those who were responsible. I am of the same blood as they, but I am just as loyal

to my husband's cause as you are. Don't you believe me?"

Gerome looked at her fondly.

"Isn't she wonderful?" he asked. "Am I not the most fortunate of men?"

"I do not believe that anyone who has the blood of our enemies in their veins, can ever be truly loyal to France!" said Paulette, and this time, her momentary courage gone, Marie hid her face on her husband's arm.

"Paulette," said Madame, "I am shocked! You grieve me beyond expression!"

The General looked at his daughter in astonishment, this was carrying things too far.

Gerome's face flushed under his tan and a dangerous light came into his eyes.

"Paulette," he said passionately, "Marie is my wife —your sister," and he turned to comfort the trembling girl in his arms.

Madame drew her away tenderly.

"Come, dear," she said, "you are tired. Let me show you your room. Paulette, you had best go to yours, you are nervous. To-morrow you will be yourself."

The girl's face flushed. They were treating her as a bad child. Rising hastily, she hurried out of the room.

Gerome kissed his wife tenderly as he bade her follow his mother.

"Good-bye for awhile, dear," he said. "I'll come to you when I have talked with my father."

CHAPTER XXIV

The night was warm for October, and a late moon was just rising. The garden seemed so peaceful, only the distant muttering of the guns constantly reminded one that not far away the Red Dragon lay in wait, its maw insatiable.

Must all the youth, the beauty of France, be offered up, before this monster was satisfied? Would this home with its pleasant orchards, its fertile gardens, be trampled under ruthless heels, laid waste as so many others had? And when it was all over, and nothing remained but smoking ruins and wasted fields, deep scars on the country's breast that time itself could scarcely heal, when all the youth and flower had become only a memory to be cherished in the bitter hearts of a saddened people, what then? What would have been accomplished? Could any price that might be paid to the victor, be great enough to compensate for this?

Some such thoughts as these went through the General's mind as he turned from the window to his son. This son, the very apple of his eye, how much longer would that eye behold him?

Gerome came to the table.

"Well, sir?" he began.

The General led the way into his study.

"We can talk more freely here," he said.

They had scarcely entered, when the butler followed with a tray of glasses and a decanter of wine.

"Anything else to-night, Monsieur?" he asked.

The General filled a glass.

"No, Antoine, that is all. You may close the windows. The Colonel will see that the door is latched as he goes out."

The man busied himself with the fastenings.

"They are to meet here to-morrow," began Gerome, but his father, with a lift of his eyebrow, indicated the butler who was just finishing his task.

"Tst!" he said warningly, and then to the man, "That will do, Antoine."

He bowed with that oddly quiet air of his.

"Very well, Monsieur, good-night," he said, and went out softly, but whether by accident or design, the door he closed after him, failed to catch and remained ever so slightly ajar.

Gerome was impatient to impart his information, and the man had scarcely gone, when he began.

"I have been given orders to notify the commanding officers of all the brigades of our division to meet here to-morrow," he said. "I must leave for St. Quentin to-night."

"The others have been informed?"

"Yes!"

The General tapped his pursed lips with his forefinger as he always did when thinking.

"H'm," he said, "by nine they should all be here."

"I have also been instructed to hand you this." Gerome took a folded paper in a long blue cover from his pocket and put it into his father's hand, much as though he were handing him the wealth of the world. "It is the plan of location of our batteries."

"This is very important, my boy," said the General, as he took the packet. "I wonder what their intelligence bureau would say if they could get their hands on this? Let us study the situation."

He pulled open a drawer and took out a leather case. They drew up chairs on either side of the table, and under the lamp light, the two heads, father's and son's, bent over the maps which the General unrolled.

The room was silent as they studied the drawings. Only the clock on the mantel, ticking out the passing minutes and the occasional rustle of the papers, broke the stillness. They were both too absorbed to have heard the sound, if there had been a sound to hear, of the door behind them, as it slowly opened the merest trifle, too intent on their work to see the lean face of Antoine as it peered through, the meekness gone from the watchful eyes, the humility from the thin, hard lips.

"I hope we can make this blow a decisive one," said Gerome.

The General flattened his finger over a spot on the map and referred to the papers his son had brought.

"It is about here, I would say," he began.

Gerome looked at him in astonishment.

"Isn't that one of the most strongly fortified parts of their line?" he asked.

"And therefore, the place where attack will be least expected."

Gerome nodded, and the General went on.

"Our artillery is being heavily engaged along the whole line, but it is at this point," and his finger

tapped the map, "that the infantry will be massed for the thrust."

"How many men will be used?" asked Gerome, leaning closer to study the situation.

"About five corps with the necessary reserves."

The young Colonel leaned back in his chair.

"It seems logical," he said, "it should succeed."

The face behind them smiled evilly and melted into the darkness back of it, and as quietly as it had opened, so quietly the door was closed.

"It's a hard game we've been playing," said the General, "but we are holding them now. They have taught us a great deal, but if this plan results as we hope," the great head went up triumphantly, "it is the beginning of the end!" His face lit up with a proud smile. "You will be the youngest officer here to-morrow."

"I am honored to be present at a conference that may decide the fate of France," said Gerome earnestly, as he rose.

His father pushed back the maps, rose to his feet, and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"My boy," he said, and his voice was full of love, the love that a fine father gives to a fine son, "I believe you are worthy of the honor. Now go and kiss your pretty wife good-night. You have a long ride before you. I am going into the garden to smoke."

Gerome looked into the kindly old eyes.

"Good-night, sir!" he said, his shoulders squared to meet the trust he saw there. "Good-night."

For a moment after his son had gone, the General stood under the lamp-light looking over the papers,

his shaggy brows were pulled down over his eyes, his lower lip pursed out. There was a wordless prayer in his heart, that this might be the end. Soldier though he was, born and bred to the sword, the red flood that was sweeping the world was nauseating, sickening. He, like many others, as bravely fighting, as unflinchingly facing the storm of war, longed for the peace that must come.

He started to roll the paper with his maps in their case, but suddenly he stopped, reconsidering, and shaking his head, placed the case carefully in his pocket. This was of too much importance to be trusted away from his keeping. From the humidor on the table he carefully selected a cigar, bit off the end, and lit it leisurely, then opening one of the long windows, strolled out into the garden to think as he smoked.

CHAPTER XXV

THE light of the General's cigar had scarcely disappeared when the door opened softly, and a head was cautiously thrust in. After a careful look about, Von Pfaffen entered. His humility was gone, and the slight stoop of his shoulders had lifted into a straight military line. He went directly to the table and began eagerly searching among the papers. Once or twice he stopped, his head raised, alertly listening, but the house was quiet and the General's walk had carried him far into the garden.

The man turned the papers over and over. Evidently he failed to find what he sought. His brows bent in disappointment, but loath to give up easily, he went on with the search.

Suddenly, the door opened again, and he turned with a start to face Nanine.

"What are you jumping for?" she laughed, her broad Breton face wrinkling curiously like one of her native russet apples.

"What do you want?" he snarled, furious at being interrupted. "I thought you were gone."

"You did, did you?" she asked suspiciously. "What difference would it make to you? I came back when the young Colonel and his wife arrived, I'm needed."

"But you're not needed here," the man's voice was shaking with impatience and anger. He had borne the insolence of this Breton peasant woman long

enough. Nanine, however, was impervious to his dislike.

"Madame wants you to take some tea and biscuits to the Colonel's wife," she said stolidly, and Antoine, with a scowl, turned back to the table.

There was so little time. Through the window he could see the red tip of the General's cigar moving back and forth as his steps carried him nearer the house.

"I can't go now, I'm busy," he said.

Nanine put her hands on her heavy hips and stood facing him insolently.

"Is the General talking, or the butler?" she mocked.

"Don't be impertinent," Antoine's brow darkened, "it's your work!"

"My work!" sneered the old woman. "It is my work to clean up about the house. What are you bothering in here for anyway?" and her small eyes narrowed suspiciously.

It did not suit Von Pfaffen's plans to have her ill-will just now. She must be cajoled.

"Look here," he said more graciously, "if you take up the tea and biscuits, I'll give you two francs."

"Two francs! H'm!" Nanine's scorn was unbounded.

"Five francs," he bargained.

Nanine looked at him out of the corner of her eye. Five francs was five francs in these hard times. It might pay to be good-natured.

"Well then," she mumbled grudgingly. "I'll do it; five francs and a bottle of Burgundy for Jacques."

The man dived into his pocket hurriedly.

"There's your money," he said thrusting it into her hand. "I'll get you the wine later. Run along, run along now, it is late," and he urged her toward the door, his eyes on the window and the ever-nearing red spark of the General's cigar.

Nanine shook his hand from her arm.

"Don't be pushing me," she grumbled, "I'll go fast enough," but Von Pfaffen fairly shoved her through the door, and shutting it tightly after her, hurried back to the table.

Once more, he searched among the maps and scattered papers. All these weeks spent here in this menial position must not be wasted. This paper was the crowning point of his work, it must be found, but the sound of the General's step on the terrace, sent him to the fireplace, where, his shoulders once more stooping in the meekness of the servant, he busied himself with the dying embers.

As the General came through the window, he glanced hastily from the man by the grate to the scattered papers on the table.

"I thought you had gone to bed," he said sharply.

"No, Monsieur," answered the man, turning to him mildly. "I have been waiting to let the Colonel out, I don't like leaving the doors unlatched these nights."

The man looked so humble, so harmless, as he rose and faced him, the sagging lines of his thin face were so pitiful, that the General was ashamed of his suspicions.

"I suppose, Antoine," he said kindly, going over to the table and beginning to gather the papers together, "you regret not being at the front?"

The man's eyes sparkled a moment, as they rested on the General's bent head.

"Yes, Monsieur," he said, with a meaning of his own, "but in serving you, I am serving my country."

This was a sentiment the old soldier could appreciate. How loyal all these men were, he thought. It was true, one could serve one's country in being of service to those who could give their blood for her.

"It must be hard for a patriot like you," he said, beginning to roll up his maps, "not to be engaged in active service."

The man dropped his eyes discreetly.

"It is, Monsieur," he said quietly, "but at present I can only watch and wait."

"Our cause must not fail, Antoine," said the General as he fastened the straps of his map case, and the man answered vehemently.

"That is what I have been saying to myself, Monsieur."

The words had such an earnest ring to them, that the General looked up curiously.

"You have been in the army, Antoine?"

"Yes, Monsieur, when I was younger. I hope to serve my country soon again."

The other sighed. At the rate France was needing men, age would soon be no barrier.

"The time may come before you expect, Antoine," he said.

The man's eyes sparkled again, and a curious smile played about his thin lips.

"I am patiently awaiting that opportunity, Monsieur," he replied.

The General looked at him with approval.

"I admire your patriotism, Antoine," he said, and the man bent in his slight, servile bow, as he answered:

"I shall endeavor to live up to it, Monsieur."

His master gathered the map cases and turned to the door.

"Well," he said a little sadly, "France may need you before the war is over."

Von Pfaffen smiled ruefully.

"I hope not, Monsieur," he said, and then added hastily, "that is—I trust it will not be necessary."

"Well," said the General, turning to the door, "see that the lights are down. Good-night," and with the map case carefully under his arm, he left the room.

Von Pfaffen stood watching him go, his eyes fixed covetously on the packet he carried. Then he shrugged his shoulders contemptuously and came back to the table, but after another fruitless look, he decided that what he was in search of was out of his reach for the time being. How to get it, that was the problem, for get it he must. For a moment he stood thinking, then carefully locking the windows, he turned out the lights and went slowly out of the room.

CHAPTER XXVI

MADAME, all kindness and solicitude, showed Marie to her room. Everything she could, she did to make the girl forget the sting of Paulette's words. She insisted upon her tasting the tea and biscuits which old Nanine brought, although Marie could scarcely swallow. She helped her out of her dusty traveling dress into a loose robe, and while Nanine brushed out the long, golden hair and plaited it loosely for her, Madame talked of the trip from Paris, asked regarding their mutual friends, and spoke of their own affairs.

Marie recognized and appreciated her kindness, knowing that she was trying to give her an opportunity to regain her composure, but she had to bite her lips till they almost bled, to refrain from giving way to her emotion.

When Nanine had tied the long plaits with ribbons and hung up Marie's clothes, she took the almost untouched tray and courtesied good-night.

After she had left, Madame kissed the girl tenderly.

"Sleep well, my daughter," she said, "we must help one another in whatever may come."

Marie's eyes overflowed, and for a moment she clung to the older woman desperately.

"Love me," she whispered, "I want you to love me in spite of anything, and oh, please remember I have never known a mother of my own!"

Madame soothed her.

"Gerome will be here in a moment, dear," she said. "I must say good-night to my boy, too," and with a parting kiss, she left her.

Marie stood a moment gazing about the large, old-fashioned room—the great bed with its sombre draperies of faded blue, the heavy black walnut dresser, in the tall mirror of which the two candles, in their silver sconces, reflected her own tear-stained face, the small white stove with a vase of flowers standing on its cold top, the long blue curtains which Nanine had carefully pulled across the windows. It was very stately, but very cold, and Marie shivered as she looked about her.

Gerome had brought her here among his own people for protection, to insure her safety and comfort when he was away. But almost her first step across the threshold, had brought her face to face with all that was horrible in her past. What a plaything Fate had made of her, first to hold out so much that was wonderful and beautiful, and then—suddenly it came over her with sickening horror what it would mean if this man, into whose eyes she had looked not more than an hour ago, should tell what he knew.

She had thought herself so secure, the past had seemed utterly obliterated, and here, on the very brink of her shelter, that past had reared its hideous head. And now, when she had all the world to lose! If he should tell! If he should, even now, be talking to Gerome or the General! She almost screamed aloud with the terror of it.

The horror and shock of finding herself face to

face with the man whom she thought had gone from her life forever, convulsed her with fear so terrible, as almost to deprive her of reason, but she must think, or go mad.

Why was he here in the garb of a servant? Would it suit his purpose to expose her or to try to force her back to him? He was in disguise here. He had refrained from recognizing her before the others. What could it all mean? Had he failed to recognize her because he feared to? Was there some power she might have over him now? If so, how could she use it?

The thought of facing him, of living under the sane roof, was agony. In her bag was a small bottle of chloral which the doctor had given her to quiet her nerves before she left Paris. With shaking fingers, she rummaged among her clothes to find it. But suddenly she threw the bag from her. A quick flutter at her heart called loudly her need to live. With the knowledge that she must go on, whatever came, she paced the floor in an agony of suspense and terror.

When Gerome knocked, she could scarcely answer, her voice died in her throat. Did he know? Had he guessed? Had her terror shown itself too plainly in her face?

He came in smiling, and as she looked at him, her chin trembled like an unhappy child's.

"Sweetheart," her husband took her in his arms, "you must not mind Paulette." So he thought it was Paulette's words that hurt, he didn't know, oh,

the relief, the blessed relief. She scarcely heard him, as he explained.

"My little sister and Maurice love each other so very much, she is really the dearest sister in the world. Be patient with her, for my sake."

Marie lifted her eyes to his.

"When you made me your wife," she said, "your people became my people; your ways, my ways; your country, my country!"

He held her close.

"We are truly one, are we not, *ma chérie?*" he whispered.

Marie's answer was passionately earnest.

"Forever and ever!" she cried.

For a long time they were silent, content to be here with one another, to know how much each meant to the other.

Presently he spoke.

"Dearest," he said, "I'll be back in the morning; you're going to be a brave little woman, aren't you?"

Marie turned away from him with a half sob.

"Oh Gerome," she stammered, "I—I need you—more than ever!"

Something in her voice, in the flush on her cheek as she turned from him, startled him. He put his hands on her shoulders and drew her face close to his.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"There's something—something I've been waiting to tell you," she whispered.

Gerome stared at her. Her cheeks were glowing with the flush that illumines the sky at dawn, and in

her deep blue eyes shone a light he had never seen there before.

"Don't you know?" she asked, "can't you guess?"

And then, in a blinding flash, he understood.

For a long moment they stared into each other's eyes, a happiness too great for words transfiguring them. The world that was bent on destroying itself, did not exist for them. It was as though God had only just spoken the words, "let there be light!" With just such wonder and awe might the first man have looked into the eyes of the first woman when she had told him the miracle.

Tenderly, very tenderly, he drew her into his arms.

"Marie, my darling," he whispered, "is it true?"

"Yes," she breathed; then fearfully, "it does make you happy?"

He led her to the couch and drew her down beside him.

"Now, every one must be kind to you, so gentle with you."

Marie hid her face against his shoulder.

"You understand now why I dread to have you leave me," she moaned.

"I'll be back to-morrow!"

"But after to-morrow——" and she began to weep bitterly.

Miserably, he sat and held her close. That this should come now, when he was going, perhaps to his death. Perhaps he should never even see this child of his. Well, if he must die, it would be in such a manner that a son of his would remember with pride!

"When I knew what was to be," she said, staring straight ahead of her, "I wanted you to take me to your home, so that if you had to be away when our baby came, I could still have the care and protection of your family, but," and the memory of the sinister face that had looked into hers, and all that it meant, sent the blood from her lips, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry!"

Gerome turned to her in wonder.

"Sorry you came here?" he asked. "Have Paulette's words——"

"No, not Paulette," broke in Marie hastily. "She does not really mean to be unkind. It is something else! I—I can't explain, but—I'm afraid—I'm afraid!"

Gerome drew her close to him and gently smoothed her hair.

It was natural, he thought, for women to be frightened at such a time, and Marie was so young, so inexperienced.

"*Bien aimée*," he whispered, "how happy we are going to be. Our lives are going to be so perfectly attuned to one another, that between us there can be nothing but harmony!"

She was sobbing afresh.

"But you are going away from me."

"Only for a few hours," he assured her, "and in the meantime you will be with my mother and sister. What harm can come to you here?"

But the girl was almost hysterical now, the strain of that sudden meeting was beginning to tell.

"Gerome," she sobbed wildly, "you will love me always? Nothing can make you change?"

"Need you ask that, now?"

But she scarcely heard him. She was thinking of Von Pfaffen, and what she had run away from in Vienna. She was dreading the time when he would tell, for that he would tell when it suited his purpose, she never doubted, nor did she doubt that the knowledge would take from her her husband's love.

"Oh Gerome," she sobbed, "if anything takes you from me! Your love is all I live for!"

Across the garden, sounded the chiming of a village clock. Gerome lifted her to her feet.

"Kiss me, *ma chérie*," he said. "I must go. Nothing can ever make me change. Are you satisfied?"

Marie clung to him.

"Let me go to the gate with you. I want to be with you as long as I can," she begged, and with his arm about her, Gerome led her down the stair.

The lights were burning dimly in the entrance hall, and the house was quiet. He slipped into his motor coat and opened the hall door. The moon was full now and the garden lay peaceful and shining under its light.

"Good-night, my darling," he said as he stooped and kissed her; "good-night, my boy's mother!"

Marie clung to him.

"Good-night," she whispered, "good-night, my dearest!"

She stood on the step and watched him go, and when the sound of the motor was no longer audible, she closed the door and started up the stairs.

CHAPTER XXVII

"WAIT!"

Out of the shadows came the whispered command. Marie staggered back against the wall with a stifled scream as she turned and looked into the face of the man she abhorred. He had thrown off all semblance of the servant and stood confronting her as she had known him in Vienna. In a swift vision, the months she had spent with him flashed by her. That night in the little beer hall when she had gone home with him; and that other night when he had laughed and told her just how little she had meant in his scheme of things. Why had he followed her? He had not wanted her enough to keep her with him always.

To Von Pfaffen, the sight of her when she had thrown back her veils, had been anything but pleasant. He had known for several days that the General's son was bringing his wife to the château, but he was not prepared for the overwhelming surprise to find that it was Marie. He saw at once that she recognized him and his first fear had been that she would betray him. But the moment passed, and she made no sign. He realized instantly that it was fear for herself that had kept her silent. His knowledge of the natural timidity of her nature, coupled with the power he had over her, led him to think out a plan that might put her presence here to his advantage. The deadly fear he saw in her face, as he accosted her now, pleased him. He knew that she

was his to do with as he liked. She would prove a useful pawn in the game he was playing.

He reached to the step where she stood and seized her hand roughly.

"Hush," he whispered, "you will not betray me!"

Marie leaned away from him, looking into his eyes with terror.

"What are you doing here?" she breathed.

"You need not ask that! I'm here for my country!" he said proudly.

The meaning of his words dawned upon her slowly. So this was the interpretation of all those strange papers she had been forbidden to touch in Vienna, his secret journeys, his mysterious business! He was a spy! Why hadn't she realized this and screamed it out when she had faced him those few hours ago? They would have taken him away before he had a chance to tell; now it was too late.

He saw that she understood, and bowed coldly.

"Yes," he said, "and you?"

"I——" she faltered. "I am a daughter of the house!"

"You?" the contempt in his voice cut her like a lash, and blindly, she started up the stair again, but his fingers grasped her wrist.

"Wait!"

She turned and looked down at him where he stood on the step below.

"Would you be so welcome if they knew, do you think?" he sneered.

Marie cowered as though against a blow.

"You—you won't tell!" she whispered.

Von Pfaffen went on fiercely.

"Listen to me," he said, "there is something I must know, something for which I have taken their insolence, their patronage," he spat out the words, "but it is for the Fatherland! Your country, and mine! You must help me!"

The girl drew herself up proudly.

"My husband's country is my country," she said, "his people are my people. Let me pass!"

Von Pfaffen dropped her hand.

"Very well," he said slowly. "Then to-morrow I will go to your husband's people, your people, and tell them that the precious wife of their son and brother——" but the girl wheeled in terror:

"Oh, no," she said, "you won't do that, you can't!"

He smiled sardonically.

"I can and will," he said, "unless you do as I wish."

Marie turned toward him piteously.

"It—it would kill him," she pleaded. "They will disown me." Her husband's kiss was still warm on her lips. Would he love her if he knew? Could he?

The man watched her closely. He knew he had struck the right note. Nothing must stand in the way of his getting the information he sought.

"How proud they would be to welcome you as their daughter if they knew!" he went on cruelly.

Marie shuddered.

"You won't tell them," she whispered, "you can't!"

His brilliant eyes narrowed.

"Will you do what I ask?" he bargained, and as she looked into his face, the hard, cold face of the fanatic who would sacrifice everything, including him-

self, to gain his end, the girl knew that he held her in his grasp.

"What is it you want?" she murmured helplessly.

With a swift motion, he seized her wrist again and brought his face close to hers.

"Remember," and he almost hissed the words, "if you betray me, I'll give the proofs—I'll——"

"What do you want!" she asked miserably, "tell me, what do you want?"

Von Pfaffen drew her down and away from the stair. He looked about carefully, and then, sure that they were secure from interruption he began:

"There is to be an important conference here to-morrow," he said in quick, short tones, his voice scarcely above a whisper, "the General and others. They are to decide the time and place where an attack is to be launched; this much I know. You must get me the name of the town—the time."

"I can't—I can't," broke in Marie, horror of what he was asking her, searing her very soul. "I can't betray them, my husband's people!"

He tightened his fingers on her arm till the pain was almost unendurable.

"Would they think twice about you if I told them who you are? What you are?" he sneered.

She stared into his eyes, her own wide with terror.

"It would mean their ruin," she gasped, "perhaps death to my husband! I can't! I can't!"

"It means disgrace to you, and the death of his love if you don't."

Marie broke away from his hold and buried her face in her hands.

"Oh God," she moaned, "and I thought the door had been closed on that part of my life, forever."

Von Pfaffen was impatient.

"Quick," he said, "decide! We may be interrupted. Will you? Remember, I always keep my word. If you get this information, I promise in the name of my government, no one shall know your share in it. Will you? Will you?"

Her slender shoulders shook with the sobs that were breaking her.

"I can't! I can't!"

Was she going to fail him after all?

"Remember," his voice was softer, "it is your country asking this, your own country!"

"My country?" Marie raised her head. "This is my country!"

Von Pfaffen looked at her with hatred in his eyes. This weak little creature, was she going to be the stumbling-block in the great work he was doing?

"Do you realize what it means if you refuse!" he asked coldly.

She knew, alas! she knew only too well what it would mean, not only to her, but to the little life she carried under her heart, the little, new life, that God himself had given into her keeping. It might cost that as well as the love of its father.

"Let me think," she gasped.

Von Pfaffen was quick to see his advantage.

"Get your husband to tell you," he said eagerly. "He will. Write the name of the place and the time where the attack is to be made, on a piece of paper. Put it where I can get it!"

Marie looked about her wildly.

"Where, where?" she asked, bewildered.

The man's face was glowing with the success of his plan.

"You'll find a place," he told her eagerly, "and a way to let me know. That is all. I promise your secret dies with me. I am the only one who knows. Young Franz was killed at the Marne. There is no one else."

Marie covered her face with her hands, but he drew them away and made her look at him.

"I can trust you?" he said, his eyes narrow, his thin mouth set and cruel, "you won't play me false? If you do, remember, it is the end of your happiness forever!"

"Yes," she said dully. "I know. I'll—I'll do it!"

With a sigh of relief, the man dropped her hands, and after a moment, she turned and went slowly up the stair. Her heart seemed dead in her bosom, her eyes were dry and burning. She clung to the balustrade with the dizziness that threatened to engulf her.

Von Pfaffen stood and watched her till she had disappeared, then he turned out the lights and softly left the hall, a smile of triumph on his lean, hard face.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The clock had chimed the hour, the half, and the hour again, and still Marie lay tossing with mental anguish under the heavy blue hangings of the great bed. What terrible thing had she promised to do? Sell her husband's honor to this creature who had taken her own. She tried to look at every side of the problem, to work out in her tortured brain just what would happen if she defied Von Pfaffen. She knew he would not hesitate to go to the General and brand her. She knew he could do that without incriminating himself. He was diabolically clever. She could see the kind look fade from the General's eyes, the flush on Madame's cheek. She could hear Paulette justifying her suspicions of her, and Gerome —she crushed her knuckles against her lips till her teeth cut into them.

To see the lovelight die in his eyes, contempt taking its place, to know that she would become an object of loathing to him! The thought was so terrible that she smothered in the pillows the cry she could not restrain. She would rather see him dead, she thought, and know that he had died loving her, believing in her purity.

What was country, war, people, everything, compared to just this one man who was life itself and all that life could mean to her? She couldn't give him up. She couldn't stand by and let his love and

faith in her be killed; she couldn't. She tossed and turned in an agony of despair.

Her imagination swept her on to the hour of her destiny, to the time when Gerome's child should be laid in her arms. If it were a son, could she bear to have him know the blot on his mother's life? Suppose it were a daughter, could she bequeath it this heritage of shame?

She went over, day by day, her life in Vienna since her father's death. In the scorching light of self-condemnation, she realized that she need not have stayed with Von Pfaffen after that one dreadful night. She could have run away then, as she had later. She saw herself as the foolish, inexperienced girl, tired of teaching stupid children, tired of singing for music hall habitués, tired of scrimping in order to live, glad of the haven and the companionship of one of her own class. She knew now that she had not been wholly ignorant of Von Pfaffen's intentions, or rather lack of intentions, toward herself, that she had simply let the days glide by, blinding herself to the situation and hoping against hope that he would marry her.

She realized now that the story, if it had ended after that first night in Von Pfaffen's apartment, would not have been so beyond pardon. But how could she ever explain those long months with him? She knew her husband's high standard of morals. She knew his intolerance of the thing that she had done. She knew his pride in the ancient family name that both he and his father had kept unsullied. And now what a blot on that honored escutcheon this would be!

"I can't bear it!" she sobbed. "I can't bear it!"

Then Von Pfaffen's words echoed in her mind like a siren's song.

"I promise in the name of my government, that no one shall know of your share in this. Your secret dies with me!"

Why hadn't he been killed at the Marne instead of Franz? Why did he have to live on to come here and torture her? Her thoughts were distorted, feverish. She saw herself an outcast, thrust into the streets, jeered at by her husband's people, despised by Gerome, her child taken from her, nothing left!

"God, oh, dear God," she moaned, "I can't let them know, I can't!"

France was her country only by adoption. The people meant nothing to her, their aims, nor this great struggle in which they were involved. Her own country meant little more. Her world was Gerome. If he were killed in battle, she could die too, and happily, if she knew that he had gone to his death loving and trusting her. But the thought that this knowledge would turn him from her, would make him curse her, living or dead, was too much for her to bear.

She hated Von Pfaffen with the deadly hatred of the woman whose betrayer uses his power over her against the man she loves. She was powerless in his grasp. She seemed to feel the steel bars of the trap he had set for her, closing against her tender flesh. Through the darkness, she could see his brilliant eyes, cold and cruel as they had looked into hers to-night. She knew she was helpless, she could only

pray that Fate might be kind, might find some avenue of escape.

The down coverlet smothered her. She tossed it to the floor and slipping her bare feet onto the polished boards, began noiselessly pacing up and down the long room. The moonlight came between the heavy curtains and lay in a white streak on the floor. Back and forth, across this, she swung like a prisoned tigress, her nails biting into the flesh of her palms, the dry sobs catching in her throat. She knew that she would do what Von Pfaffen had insisted on her doing. She knew her courage was not great enough to take the consequences if she did not, but she loathed and hated herself, her very soul cried out against what she was going to do, cried out, as it beat against the bars her tormentor had forged for her.

Suddenly, through the stillness, came a slight sound, a faint rustling on the thick carpet of the corridor outside her door.

She stopped her wild pacing to listen. There it was again. Some one was astir, some one, whose stealthy, furtive movements, plainly told of their wish to be unheard.

She slipped into the loose robe Madame had left with her, and softly opened the door. Down the corridor, a spot of light from an electric torch danced uncertainly. Presently it stopped at the door of the General's bedroom, which was opened cautiously. The light was extinguished, and then silence.

Soundlessly she crept along the corridor toward the door which had been left purposely ajar, and

through the crack, she could see the spot of light fluttering about the room. It rested for a moment on the fine face of the old soldier lying peacefully asleep, then shifted to the chair at the foot of the bed, over which hung his coat. A hand suddenly sprang out of the darkness and groped through the pockets. She heard a faint rustle of paper and the light was extinguished again.

She had only just time to slip back and flatten herself against the wall, when a man came out and softly closed the door after him.

She watched the light winking on and off, as he went down the stair and across the hall, and then noiselessly, she started to follow.

CHAPTER XXIX

The great stairway took a wide turn at a sort of landing about halfway down, from where the whole length of the hall could be seen, as well as the rooms opening upon the corridor above. Here Marie paused for a moment, and watched the light as it crossed the hallway.

On the left, the double doors of the great dining-room were slightly ajar, and through these it disappeared, leaving the hall in darkness save for the moonlight that came through the tall windows. Without further thought, she hurried down the stair and after the dark figure. As she reached the dining-room, the light had just disappeared through the green baize swinging-door that led into the butler's pantry, and holding her robe close about her, the girl followed.

The dining-room looked very cold and vast in the pale moonlight, the massive chairs and heavy carved table sending black shadows along the polished floor. From around the edges of the swinging-door came a faint light. Cautiously, she put her hand against the panel and pushed the door open the merest trifle. Through the crack she could see a man at the serving-table which stood against the wall. In the faint light of a candle which he had evidently just lit, she recognized Von Pfaffen.

In what fresh evil was he engaged? What was it

he had taken from the General's room? She might be of use after all. Apparently satisfied that he was alone, he slipped a paper out of his pocket, and spreading it on the table began making a tracing.

She could not see what this was. She could only distinguish its blue cover and that it appeared to be some sort of a map.

He worked quickly, and with the ease born of long experience.

Wondering, she watched as he rolled the thin tissue paper copy he had made, in a tiny tube and thrust it into what appeared to be a quill. Then she saw him stoop and pick up a basket from the floor. Opening the wicket, he took out a gray pigeon, which fluttered for a moment in his hands. Carefully, he fastened the quill to its leg, his head bent low over the task.

She must see more. Cautiously her hand pressed the door, but the hinge creaked faintly under her light touch, and at the sound he hastily thrust the pigeon back into the basket, secured the wicket, and blew out the candle. Under cover of the darkness the girl pushed the door wide. This time the hinge made no sound, and after a tense moment, Von Pfaffen cautiously turned on his electric torch. The little stream of light struck full in her face.

"You!" he swore hoarsely.

"What are you doing?" she demanded.

He scowled at her. He had thought her safely out of the way for the night.

"My duty!" he said, between his teeth.

She took a step backward, but the man grasped her by the arm, and drew her into the little room. As the

green baize door swung shut after them, with a quick movement, he latched it securely.

"You will be silent," he hissed.

She held away from him defiantly.

"Suppose I were to call the General?"

"He would have me shot!" his voice was coldly indifferent. "But before I died, by God, I'd tell a story that would send you into the streets to-night."

Marie gasped and he clutched her arm tighter.

"If you make a sound," he said, "I shall go to the General now, and tell him what you are."

For a moment, she had a wild thought of running swiftly back the way she had come, of awakening the General, of facing the consequences.

"But if I give the alarm?" she asked, almost under her breath.

He shot a quick look at her, sure of his quarry.

"I'm not afraid of that! You would not dare!" he said, looking at her evilly.

Marie subsided. She could not. He was right.

"Is—is it all so important?" she faltered.

Was the woman mad? Couldn't she be made to understand?

"Important?" His voice was hoarsely eager. "If I get this safely over, it will mean thousands, hundreds of thousands to me, it will mean the Cross, it will mean glory to my country. Why, the Fate of France might depend upon it!"

Marie stared at him, wide-eyed.

"The Fate of France," she echoed. The Fate of France was Gerome's fate, was hers! The Fate of France!

Von Pfaffen held up the long blue envelope.

"This must be returned," he said; "no one must suspect that it has been tampered with." A plan was forming itself in his mind. It was the inspiration of the moment, and his cruel nature gloated over it. He regarded her with a sardonic smile, as he relit the candle. "You have come upon me very opportunely," he said.

She did not hear him, she was staring into vacancy, his phrase, the "Fate of France," echoing over and over in her mind.

Von Pfaffen drew her eyes to his.

"I cannot take this back," he said. "If I were discovered, I could not complete my work here. You must do it," his words cut across her brain clearly, definitely. She shrank away from him, terrified.

"I!" she gasped.

"Yes, you," went on her tormentor, "at once. He sleeps soundly. On a chair by his bed, hangs his coat. You must slip this into the left inside pocket. Do this," there was a deep meaning in his voice, "and we are both safe!"

"My God," she whispered, "I can't do it. I, an alien here, under their roof for the first night! If he waked and found me, what could I say to clear myself? I can't!"

Von Pfaffen's eyes were almost hypnotic as they glittered in the dim light.

"You will take the paper back!" he repeated distinctly.

"I cannot!"

"You must!" his face was very close to hers in the little pool of yellow light.

She wrung her hands. In her fancy, she seemed like the gray pigeon she had seen fluttering in his grasp. She was just as helpless.

"What shall I do? What can I do?" she kept repeating over and over.

Von Pfaffen kept his eyes on hers.

"Do what I say," he answered; "and to-morrow, after you have given me the information that will cap this, I have sworn to you, and I shall keep my word, I go out of your life forever!"

She was groping desperately in her mind for some way out of it, something she could do to save the "Fate of France."

Von Pfaffen turned and went back to the table.

"I'll arrange this again carefully," he said, "no one must suspect."

As he bent over his task, Marie's eyes fell on the wicker basket in the shadow. Through the bars, protruded the edge of the little tube fastened to the bird's leg. She looked at it fascinated, a daring possibility shaping itself in her mind. The Fate of France! She glanced swiftly from the basket to the man silhouetted against the light, her heart beating wildly.

It was the work of an instant to insert her hand in the basket, extract the tracing from the quill and hide it in her bosom.

The next moment, he had finished his work, and was examing it critically before the light.

"There," he said, as he turned to her again, "I

think now, even to the eyes of the old fox, it will seem untampered with."

She held out a trembling hand.

"Give it to me," she cried hurriedly. "Give it to me."

"You have grown most anxious suddenly!" Von Pfaffen eyed her suspiciously.

The girl bit her lip. She was in an agony of suspense lest he should discover the absence of the tracing before she could have time to return the original.

"I want to get it over with," she said desperately.

"If you play me false now," his face was terrifying, "I swear that there will be nothing I won't do to make you suffer!"

"Give me the paper," she begged.

Von Pfaffen slipped it into his pocket with a mocking smile. He thought he understood her sudden eagerness.

"It won't do to run any risk. First my copy must be off!"

"But every moment is precious," pleaded Marie, fearful of discovery, "some one may waken."

The man stooped and picked up the basket.

"You are right," he agreed. "Do you know what this paper is? It is the exact location of their batteries. Our aviators have searched and searched, but they have masked them so damn well, we couldn't find them. But I've got it!" In his triumph, his voice rose and his eyes sparkled wildly.

Would he never have done? She felt that her nerves would snap under the strain.

"Oh, hurry, hurry," she breathed.

Von Pfaffen went to the door and opened it softly. She followed close at his heels as he went noiselessly out through the long dining-room and across the hall. Carefully he opened the great door, and, seizing her hand, led her out onto the terrace. Then he opened the little wicket and lifted the cage above his head.

For a moment they waited. There was a faint rustle. The bird had sensed its freedom. It stood poised a moment at the opened cage door, then with a swift whirr, it was out, soaring upward and away through the moonlight.

Von Pfaffen, his square shoulders straight, his lean face lifted to watch the flight, raised his hand in a military salute.

"Take my greetings to the Fatherland," he cried softly, and Marie, her hands pressed tightly against her bosom, where the paper lay hidden, breathed a prayer for France.

When the bird had disappeared, he turned and led her back into the hall, softly closing the door after them.

"Now your work," he said as he handed her the blue envelope, "here is the paper. Remember to put it in the left inside pocket, and for God's sake, be careful!"

She took it eagerly and started toward the stair.

Von Pfaffen handed her the little torch.

"Take this," he said, and with the light held in her hand, she went up the broad stair.

He stood below watching her until she disappeared into the General's room. After what seemed an age

to the man below, she came out again noiselessly and closed the door after her. Her bare feet made no sound on the thick carpet. Breathlessly, she leaned against the railing. Up through the darkness, came Von Pfaffen's hoarse whisper.

"All right?"

Her answer floated down to him, "yes!"

With a muttered exclamation, he turned and left the hall. Quiet settled down once more over the house.

Marie crept softly into her own room, and lit one of the tall candles. Then she locked and barred the door and stood motionless, listening, before the great walnut dresser. She fumbled in the bosom of her robe and brought out the little tracing. Her lips were dry, her eyes dilated, her cheeks scorching. Dimly in the mirror she could see herself outlined partly by the faint moonlight, partly by the flickering candle.

With a strangled sob, she held the paper to the flame. It coiled quickly into a tiny black ribbon and lay a pinch of ashes in her hand, then she blew out the candle and crept into the great bed under the shadow of the heavy blue curtain.

CHAPTER XXX

Up and down, up and down, outside the long study windows marched a sentry. Outside the great gate stood another. Even the house door was guarded.

Angèle, her round arms bare, a great apron tied about her, her feet in wooden sabots, was busy scrubbing the kitchen floor of the gate house when the first company arrived. Soldiers were no new sight to the girl by now, but so many here, what could it mean? She dried her hands and clattered out to open the gates.

"Keep them open, my girl," smiled the Captain. "Others are coming," and leaving her standing round-eyed and open-mouthed, he took his men and stationed them about the place.

"What does it mean?" she asked one of them.

The young soldier left to guard the gate, smiled at her as he shouldered his gun and began pacing up and down, but his Captain was still within ear-shot and so he made no answer.

The girl turned and hurried back into the house.

"*Ma mère,*" she called (Nanine was the only mother she had ever known) "*ma mère,* war has come even into the château."

"Eh," wheezed the old woman, coming heavily down the stair. "What are you saying?" Angéle bade her look out of the window. By now, several automobiles had arrived and were dislodging their passengers at

the great door, care-worn looking men for the most part, grizzled of hair and mustache, their heavy army coats dusty and mud-splashed.

Nanine put her head, in its broad Breton cap, out of the door, only to find herself facing a sentry standing there.

"Orders are to stay indoors this morning, *bonne femme*," he said cheerily.

If anyone but a French soldier had dared to bar her way, a storm would have broken about his head, but to Nanine, the horizon blue of a *poilu's* uniform, was never to be gainsaid in anything.

"*Eh bien, mon gosse*, if you say so, I'll stay in all week!" she answered.

The man grinned and resumed his sentry-go.

The purring motors brought Marie to her window. She had tossed and turned through the dark hours, dreading the task that was before her. Her mind whirled trying to plan a way that might satisfy Von Pfaffen and yet not betray her husband's cause. But like a wild bird, she beat against her prison bars, knowing there was no way out.

As she parted the curtains and looked out on the driveway, Gerome was just stepping from a motor car. There were three other officers with him, a tall thin man with a long nose and a heavy gray mustache, and a fat, red-faced man who wore a general's stars. The third, she could not see, his face was so muffled in his coat collar, although the day, early as it was, was quite warm. Another motor, whose occupants had evidently already entered the house, was just turning from the door.

She pushed the curtains back and stood looking out into the sunshine. How peaceful everything looked, and yet in the room below her, men were planning the best way to surprise and kill thousands of their fellow men, and here was she, her brain whirling, trying to devise a means to discover how they were to accomplish it.

She slipped quickly into her clothes and sat down again by the window to wait until the conference should be over. She knew that Gerome would come to her then. Every nerve was strained with a harrowing expectancy. It was as though she awaited her execution.

The little gilt clock on her dressing-table, cheerily ticked out the minutes as though they had been filled with joy, instead of agony. The sun sparkled and glittered on the dew-wet leaves as brilliantly as though the whole world on which it shone was as peaceful as the château garden. A robin was fluting happily. But up and down, before the door and before the great gate, paced the sentries, and from the distant horizon came the ever-present rumbling of the guns.

She sat staring at the thin lace curtains fluttering gently in the breeze, under the faded blue ones. What was the day to bring her, she wondered?

There was a gentle knock at the door. She turned with a start. In answer to her faint, "*Entrez,*" Madame came in.

"You are awake, dear?" she said gently. "I came to see. The General is having a very important meeting in his study and has asked me not to have the

servants come into the house. Will you mind waiting for your breakfast?"

Marie had risen to greet her.

"No, no," she said hastily, "I don't think I shall want anything to eat," and her hands trembled at her throat.

Madame led her back to the chair and made her sit down.

"We must all be brave," she said gently.

As she spoke, they could hear the door of the General's study opening and a murmur of men's voices.

Madame listened attentively for a moment.

"The conference is over," she said, "pray God what they have decided may be successful."

Marie turned miserably back to the window. The time for her task was drawing nearer. There might be some way out of it. There must be.

"I'll order coffee now," said Madame. "Try to be calm, dear, we women live in a man's world," and with a sigh, she left her.

Marie watched the officers come out and get into their motors. She watched the General standing tall and straight in the sunshine, as he shook hands with his *confrères*. Gerome's voice came up to her, as he told his father he would go as far as the village with them, and then come back, and she knew it meant he was coming back to her.

She watched the motors go down the driveway and out of the great gates. The General saluted the last man as he left, and then turned back into the house. The little band of soldiers mustered under their Captain and started after the chugging cars. Angèle

pushed the heavy gates closed after them and clattered back to her scrubbing, and as the sound of the motors died away in the distance, Marie fell on her knees by the bed.

"Oh God," she prayed, "help me! Help me!"

CHAPTER XXXI

As the General strode back across the hall, Madame came down the stairs.

"May I come in?" she asked. "Is the conference over?"

He looked up at her seriously.

"I have just bade them good-bye, Cecile; we have had an anxious morning, but please God, it will result in victory for France."

Madame smiled.

"Is that all I am to hear, my husband?"

"A soldier's wife must not ask," he said, "what there is for her to know is told without a question."

"And I am content that you know best," she said, looking at him tenderly.

He put his hands on her shoulders. For a moment they stood looking into each other's eyes.

"I am waiting to say good-bye to Gerome," she said at last.

Her voice was calm and even, her clear eyes looked into his bravely, unflinchingly. These two had lived together so long that the spoken word was unnecessary to convey their thoughts to one another. The absence of demonstration in sorrow is often its best indication of sincerity, and although her proud face gave no sign, he knew the struggle that was going on in her breast. He knew that she lived only for this son of theirs, a son who was worthy of the pride

they felt in him. And to-day, he was to march away to take his place in that Armageddon from which so few returned, or returned in such a manner as to mock the splendid manhood that had been theirs.

"Cecile," he said, "I understand! We can only hope! He is one of the army, and the army is France! If he does not come back to us, then he will have died the noblest death that can come to a man! He will have given his life for his country!"

She smiled bravely.

"And when their country has needed them," she said, "the women of France have never been called upon in vain."

Her husband looked at her, the fine lift of her stately head, the calm poise of her clear eyes.

"You are the spirit of France itself," he said; "women like you have been the inspiration in every crisis in our history!"

Madame sighed. This beautiful life of theirs, these years of happiness together, how could she even think of so bitter an ending as war must bring. But he must not be disappointed in her. She must be what he thought her, the spirit of France itself.

"I am so concerned about Marie," she said, after a moment; "do you think the government will take any action because of her being an alien?"

"No, no," he said, "they were married before the war. She has lived in Paris now over a year, there is no cause for anxiety."

The girl's sad face was still vividly in her mother-in-law's memory.

"Still," she said, "I'm glad Gerome brought her

here, it lessens the chance of her being embarrassed by prying officials."

"My dear," he said, "we won't criticise the government for taking every precaution at a time like this."

Madame looked up the stairs toward Marie's room. With a woman's intuition, she had sensed something of the struggle going on in the girl's soul; with the eyes of a mother she had laid the cause at one door.

"There must be many marriages such as this," she said, "and how sad it is for all concerned, for although their loyalty may be unquestioned, in the minds of some there may lurk a doubt."

"And yet," he said, "if there had been more of these international marriages, this war might never have occurred!"

She smiled faintly. She was accustomed to these Utopian theories. She had heard him work out to his own satisfaction all the problems of humanity, wondering at a blundering world for not finding the solutions that were so simple to him, but this was a new subject.

"Universal peace would be the most precious gift God could bestow on his people," she said. "How will these international marriages help to bring it about? War not only tears husband and wife apart by death, but by allegiance to different causes. How could that be overcome?"

He looked at her seriously.

"I believe that our sons and daughters should seek their proper mates from environments far removed from one another. In that way, the best of civilization would be evenly distributed. The best blood, the

best intellect, the best culture. Then no one country could believe itself to have a monopoly. There would be one universal language, mutual interest, new blood would be infused into decadent veins, new vigor, strength, mental and physical. Political boundaries would be meaningless, political differences would be impossible, and the sword would be sheathed forever!"

"This is a strange philosophy for a soldier," she said smilingly, "one whose profession is arms!"

"The soldier is the nation's surgeon," he said; "he tries to cut away the evils that menace its existence, and he most of all is glad when his work is finished. He seldom feels the hatred and rancor that is so common to the civilian who fights his battles over a dinner table."

Together they walked to the window. Up and down the drive the tire marks of the recent motors crossed and recrossed. Low down on the distant horizon hung the dark form of an observation balloon. And dull, reverberating, incessant, muttered the guns.

With a sigh the General turned from the window.

"Come, my dear," he said, "there are some important papers to go over before I leave!"

CHAPTER XXXII

When Von Pfaffen came into the salon, the curtains were still drawn across the windows, the chairs still awry, and on the little escritoire papers lay scattered about as they had been left the night before.

Madame had obeyed the General's orders literally, and the servants had been excluded from the house while the conference was going on.

He pushed back the heavy curtains and opened the windows. His shoulders squared as he filled his lungs with the crisp morning air. His cloak of humility was completely cast aside, but at a step in the hall, he turned quickly, again the servant.

Marie opened the door softly. As she saw him, her face blanched. She stepped back, but the man stopped her.

"Shut the door," he said peremptorily, and scarcely conscious of what she did, the girl obeyed him.

He came close to her, his lean face eagerly alight.

"Well," he said, "any news?"

"None!" Marie shrank away from him. "I haven't seen my husband yet."

Von Pfaffen's lips pulled back across his teeth in an oath, and the girl looked up at him piteously.

"Why couldn't you do it?" she pleaded. "It's your work, and honorable, I suppose, for you."

He turned on her fiercely.

"How could I?" he snarled, "with a guard at every door."

Marie looked into his cold eyes.

"Have you no mercy? Was not last night enough to ask of me?" Her memory went back again to those dreadful moments at the General's bedside. "Once I thought he was awake," she whispered, "his eyes staring straight at me. It was all I could do to prevent myself from shrieking aloud."

Von Pfaffen's jaw set, a little muscle in his cheek worked nervously.

"You're not going to fail me now? You haven't let him go without getting me that information?"

Marie shuddered under the hatred in his eyes.

"No, no," she said hastily, "he has only gone as far as the village with the other officers. He'll be back to say good-bye to me," and then she added piteously, "Must I? Must I?"

"There is no other way!" Von Pfaffen clutched her wrist in a grip of iron. "He must not leave before you know," he said almost against her face; "do you hear? If he does, and this information which means so much to our country—yes," as she tried to pull away, "yours as well as mine—if this information slips away from me, I'll——"

She struggled in his grasp.

"Oh, please, please!" she pleaded, but he went on brutally:

"I'll fling your shame in every face I meet. I'll brand you as——"

"Please! Please!"

He flung her hand away from him.

"See then that you do as I tell you, and I give you my word you are safe, otherwise——" There was a

step on the gravel outside. "Hush," he whispered, "here he comes," and as Gerome stepped through the window, Von Pfaffen relapsed once more into the manner of a servant.

"Good morning, Monsieur," he said softly.

Gerome smiled into his wife's white face.

"Good morning," he said.

Von Pfaffen turned to Marie, his shoulders stooping with the meekness of Antoine, his eyes blazing with the threat he held for her if she failed him.

"Anything more, Madame?" he asked softly.

She was breathless. Why didn't he go, why couldn't he leave her alone?

"No," she said desperately, "only go!"

"Yes, Madame," adding with deep significance, "I am serving luncheon in the garden to-day," and he turned and left the room, but even while she looked up into her husband's wondering face, she knew that Von Pfaffen would be going back and forth just outside the windows, as he laid the table, going back and forth much as the sentry had done earlier in the morning, watching every move she made, everything she did. She was trapped. Her Judas-hour had come!

Gerome put his arm about her shoulders and lifted her lips to his.

"My dear," he said, "why this impatience? Poor Antoine, what must he have thought?"

She hid her face against his arm, her shoulders quivering.

"I don't know," she sobbed, "I don't care, I only know that you are going to-day—this morning—oh God, am I ever going to see you again?"

Gerome held her close.

"Marie," he murmured, "it is for you and for our beloved country!"

She clung to him. Oh, to have him with her always, to be away from everything and everybody, just they two. Why hadn't some power told her that somewhere this man was waiting for her, so that she might have come to him as pure as he thought her?

"You're all I have," she cried, "what is France, people, armies, the whole world, compared to you?"

His heart was bleeding too, with the tragedy of having to leave her now, of all times, but he must not let her see.

"My dearest," he said unsteadily, "are you a soldier's wife, and send him into battle this way? Are you going to let me go remembering only your tears?"

"I love you, I love you!" Her very soul was shaking with her grief; "you're all I have." He held her away from him and tried to force her to look into his eyes.

"Let me feel that you are sending me to fight for France and you," he pleaded, "with a smile on your lips, pride in your heart, because of the honor done me!"

Marie looked at him, all the love she had to give in her eyes. The pride he asked for was in her heart, the smile struggled to her lips, then through the window she caught sight of Von Pfaffen. He was too far off to hear what they were saying, but his eyes held hers meaningly.

The smile faded, leaving her face set and tragic.

"Where are you going?" she began desperately, "where are you going?"

He shook his head.

"That," he said seriously, "I may not tell you."

"I must know, I must know!" Von Pfaffen was watching her. She must go on. The tide was too strong, it swept her on relentlessly. "I must know!"

"Marie," he said, pressing his cheek against her hair, "Don't you know you're asking something that I must guard with my honor?"

For a moment she sobbed aloud against his shoulder. Even with her eyes hidden, she knew that Von Pfaffen was standing just beyond in the garden, meekly laying the table for luncheon, but ready to throw aside the humility of the servant and stand before her, her accuser. She must go on.

"Then it's true," she sobbed, "it's true, what I've been fearing, what I've been dreading. There is to be a terrible battle somewhere, soon. I won't know where."

"Hush, *ma chérie*," soothed Gerome, but she sobbed on.

"I must know! I must know!"

"Marie," it was almost more than he could bear. The agony of her grief frightened him.

"Don't you love me enough to tell me?" she pleaded. "I must know! You may be wounded, you may be killed!"

Gerome's endurance was almost worn away.

"Listen, Marie——" he began, but she shook her head.

"I must know," she begged, "you don't know what it means to me!"

Her sobs were so wild, her form shook so with their force, the man's will broke.

"Darling," he whispered passionately, "I can't bear this! Please—please—if I tell you, will you promise to be brave?"

Marie sprang away from him.

The consciousness of the awful thing she was doing overwhelmed her like a deluge. Now that the information she wanted was trembling on her husband's lips, her soul cried aloud to stop it, to prevent his telling before it was too late.

"Don't tell me," she cried, "don't tell me," but he crushed her close to him.

"Will you remember," he said tenderly, "that it is not only my honor that I am giving into your keeping, but my country's safety?"

He must not tell her, she would not listen. She cowered in his arms, but Gerome went on. It was too late.

"My loved one, listen," he whispered, "I want you to pray as you have never prayed before, that to-morrow, at dawn, before the forts of Draise, God will grant our beloved country victory!"

Marie sank into his arms.

"Ah," she breathed, "Draise — to-morrow — at dawn!"

She had nerved herself for the ordeal and it had come. A cold wave passed over her, she felt her expression alter, her features set. She seemed to hang in a great void, all the natural forces of her nature

for the moment were suspended. And then she was looking into his eyes again. As from a great distance, she heard his voice.

"Marie, what is it? Don't look at me like that! I am only one of the millions and for every man who goes there is a woman who mourns. It is hard for you, I know, terribly hard, yet they endure, and so must you. In a great struggle like this, the individual is lost. He is only a stone in the rampart erected against tyranny. We do not serve our own ends, but we are united for a cause that means more to all of us than life or any personal sacrifice that man can make! I would be unworthy of your love if I were not willing to do my duty for my country at no matter what cost to me, and I know that you would do likewise."

His arms were about her, his face close to hers, there was a light in his eyes that she had never seen there before.

A veil that had obscured her clear vision was torn away. For the first time she understood how false, how wrong had been the structure on which she had built. Real sacrifice meant denying oneself so that ideals much greater than can have to do with individual affairs might be served. A country's cause, the saving or the loss of which would make millions happy or miserable, that is what she was about to jeopardize! In her weakness and miserable selfishness she had almost been tempted to do a dreadful deed.

For a moment she shuddered, then she lifted her face to his. The light in his eyes flooded into hers,

sank into her heart, transfigured her. Gerome, looking at her, saw a miracle come to pass, for the weak, trembling creature, quaking with terror who had crept into his arms with the kiss of betrayal upon her lips, had passed away leaving a radiant-faced, glowing-eyed, courageous woman.

She had the information that would assure her safety, yet she knew that no matter what the consequences to her, she would never use it.

"My darling," she said, and her voice was clear and firm, "my gift to your country is the most precious thing I have, and I give it proudly!"

There was a tense silence, too sacred for words.

"I must go," he said at last, unsteadily; "kiss me again!"

She lifted her lips to his in a long kiss, wildly, passionately, a kiss that might be their last in this world, but that to her meant the sacred seal of his faith in her.

Then he tore himself away. As long as she could see him from the window, her eyes held their new light of exaltation, but when the gates had closed after him, she sank huddled into a chair, weeping bitterly.

Presently she raised her head. Von Pfaffen stood in the garden watching. His sinister stare had penetrated her consciousness and brought her back to a realization of what lay before her.

With an effort she calmed herself. It was necessary for her to think, to plan. In a few moments he would come for the information. What was she to tell him? There was no doubt that he knew she had

obtained it. Would she defy him? Tell him to do his worst and take the consequences? Would she expose him to the General, give him up to arrest, and so make it impossible for him to do further harm? Or was there a better way?

In the whirling tangle of her thoughts a plan was shaping itself. Vague, formless as yet, but a plan the daring of which set her heart throbbing with the magnitude of its possibilities.

Gerome's words echoed and re-echoed in her brain.

"Draise—to-morrow—at dawn!"

Von Pfaffen's instructions had been——

"Write the name of the town and the time on a slip of paper."

Suppose she should substitute the name of some other town for the one which her husband had told her, a place far removed from the point where the attack would actually be made?

If the enemy could be given the wrong information and act upon it, would it not mean that he would turn his forces away from the point where the battle was to be fought and so assure victory for the French?

This man had taken advantage of her inexperience and had wrought evil and unhappiness in her life in the guise of a friend. He was so sure of his power over her, that he was trying to use her as an instrument against her husband and the cause for which at this moment he might be giving his life. Surely she was justified in bringing confusion to his plans which were directed against herself and those who were dear to her.

To outwit him! To make his efforts to crush her be the means of his own undoing. To prove to him that the wife of Gerome, developed and strengthened in the atmosphere of love with which she had been surrounded, was a different woman from the weak, inexperienced Marie of Vienna.

Her gentle heart had never known the desire for revenge, but as her mind reviewed all that she had suffered at the hands of Von Pfaffen, she felt for the first time the flame of bitter hatred. She would crush him as he had thought to crush her. She would give him information, but of such a nature as to ruin his career, defeat the plans of the cause he served.

But what place should she substitute for the right one? She had often heard her little maid in Paris speak of Sains, the town where she was born. She knew it was near the frontier, though some distance from Draise. Why not write Sains instead of Draise?

She well knew the nature of the man with whom she was dealing. He would never rest until he had been revenged upon her. She scarcely dared think what it would mean to her when her husband and his family knew everything. But Gerome had spoken of sacrifice. This would be hers for the cause he loved.

Her cheeks flushed, her eyes were brilliant. She hurried to the little escritoire and wrote hastily on a slip of paper:

"Sains—to-morrow—at daybreak."

As she finished Von Pfaffen entered from the garden. He came toward her, an eager gleam in his eyes, but before he could speak the door opened and Paulette entered.

"Antoine," she said, "father wishes to see you in the library."

He ground his teeth.

"Yes, Mademoiselle," he answered curtly, but as he made no move to go, Paulette, surprised, repeated:

"At once, do you hear? He is waiting!"

Again he answered, his face purple with suppressed rage:

"Yes, Mademoiselle," and with almost a military turn, he left the room.

Marie waited, breathlessly.

Paulette noticed her agitation and attributed it to her rudeness of the night before. She came over to her sister-in-law contritely.

"Marie," she began, "I was unkind yesterday. Forgive me, I can feel for you. I know what you are suffering."

Marie's fear was that the little paper on the desk might fail to serve its purpose, that something might occur to warn Von Pfaffen. She knew that he would leave as soon as he got possession of it. She was in an agony of apprehension lest this interruption now, when every moment was precious, might in some way thwart her plan.

But Paulette saw only in her distress sorrow at Gerome's going. Her heart, naturally kind, warped though it was for the time by the bitter hatred for the enemies of the man she loved, sympathized with her alien sister-in-law. Love she could understand. She must do what she could to help her. Her mother had been right.

"Let us be friends," she said. "Gerome wishes it. Let us comfort one another."

Marie stared at her blindly. Could she tell this girl? Would she have done the same thing? Her eyes looked far away.

"Paulette," she said at last, "there is nothing worth while but the love of the one you care for, is there?"

"That and his honor," answered the girl.

"His honor!" repeated Marie. Thank God she had not betrayed his honor. She took her sister-in-law's hands in hers. Perhaps after all her plan had not been the right one. Perhaps this girl could tell her a better way. "Suppose you had to choose, and you could save only one thing," she said, "Maurice's honor, or his love for you, which would it be?"

Paulette looked at her in surprise.

"I don't understand," she said, "that could not be possible. We can all only pray that they come back to us."

Marie turned away with a catch in her throat.

"Paulette," she said, "if you only understood!"

The girl put her arm about her waist.

"Come," she said soothingly, "let me take you to your room. We can be more quiet there."

With all her heart Marie prayed that the sacrifice she was making might not be in vain, that it would in some small measure make amends for what she had done in the past.

With a sigh she let Paulette lead her away.

CHAPTER XXXIII

MADAME coming in later, found the room still disordered, and as she rang the bell, she shook her head over the interrupted routine of the household. Even with all the serious problems before them, the little every-day things must not be neglected.

"Nanine," she said, when the old woman answered her ring, "the General's friends are gone, and you can put the room in order now."

"Yes, Madame," the old woman looked about her, grumbling. Long before this hour the work of the household was usually finished.

"The little desk also, Nanine," Madame reminded her as she was leaving the room; "gather up all those waste papers and burn them," and she closed the door after her.

The old woman went about heavily, pulling the chairs in place and arranging the disordered table. Then she went to the desk and swept into her broad apron the loose papers. With them went the little note Marie had left for Von Pfaffen, the slip of paper that was to sacrifice her happiness for the sake of France.

But Nanine only grumbled at this extra work. This was what Antoine should do. Where was he? Why wasn't he here? She shuffled to the fireplace and emptied her apron into the grate. Stooping stiffly she struck a match and lit the little pile of papers. As they blazed up, she rested back on her heels, her shriveled old hands held out to the tiny

blaze, grateful for the warmth on this crisp morning.

She didn't hear the door open, nor see the dusty, hard-ridden young soldier who entered. Her faded old eyes stared into the flames, tearless, but full of the hopeless tragedy of the peasant who gives all and must never ask why.

"Mother!" and at the word she turned with a start.

"Jacques!" she cried, scrambling to her feet. "Back so soon?"

"The message from Captain le Cerf was received at Headquarters," he told her as he kissed her, "and I was ordered to bring it here at once."

Even in her joy at seeing this dearly loved son the old woman's heart was glad for Paulette.

"So he got away?" she said; "won't my little Mam'selle be happy? When is he expected?"

Jacques stretched his dusty length in Madame's damask-covered chair, and his mother did not reprimand him. Nothing was too good for him.

"He'll be at Sains," he said, "to-morrow, at daybreak!"

"At Sains?" she said, "why, that's not far!"

Jacques held up a note.

"He arrives to-morrow at daybreak," he said; "it's written here."

She came to his side with her head as close to his as the great wings of her Breton cap would allow, and peered at the paper the boy held out to her.

" 'Sains—to-morrow—at daybreak,' " she read slowly, her broad forefinger tracing out the words.

She laid the note down on the desk, almost on the

same spot where not many minutes before had rested Marie's hasty scrawl.

"Do you have to go back at once?" she asked wistfully.

The boy patted her shoulder.

"Yes, mother," he said; "there is great work to do, and I must get back and do my share!"

"But," and her voice shook, "when will I see you again?"

"I don't know, mother," he said, "I can't tell!"

Quite suddenly the tears started from her faded eyes and trickled down the furrows of her rough cheeks.

"You will be careful?" she asked huskily; "you're all I have now, I'm—I'm getting a bit old and—you're all I have," she finished weakly.

Jacques patted her shoulder roughly.

"Don't worry, mother," he grinned, sheepishly conscious of the tears in his own eyes, "don't worry, I'll come back!"

The old woman clung to him fiercely, her chin quivering, her faded eyes blazing with the fire that outlasts all others.

"Why do you have to go?" she cried hoarsely, "what have we ever done? Why should you kill anyone? Why should anyone kill you? Why? What's it all for? What's it all about?" Her withered cheeks were wet, her staunch old heart was torn with a sort of bewildered sorrow. "Why should my other two boys be taken from me?" she went on. "Pierre, the finest smith in Brittany! Jean, who could lift an ox off its feet! I don't understand!"

The last of her brood shook his sturdy head. He, too, had asked himself "why?" He had heard others about him asking why, and to none had there been given an explanation.

"I don't understand myself, mother," he said; "but the country says we must go, and so we go!"

The old woman's anger flared up again.

"The ones who should suffer are those who set them on," she cried; "but they never do! They never do! It is only we mothers of strong young men. I don't see why!"

Jacques looked at her gravely. "It is for our country," he said; "they want to invade it, destroy our homes, our fine old buildings. We can't let them do that," and he squared his shoulders as his country was doing. "We'll go on fighting till they stop trying!" he said.

Nanine dried her eyes on her apron.

"I suppose you're right, Jacques," she sighed, "but I've given two."

"The officers say it will be over soon!"

"Yes," she answered, "they've said that for a long time, but it goes on, and men are being ground up like—like coffee in a mill!"

Jacques laughed.

"Not me, mother," he assured her.

"How do I know?" her heavy lips were quivering pathetically again; "when you were a prisoner I thought you were safe till it was all over. I thought I'd saved one out of the three!"

Jacques sighed. He never remembered seeing his mother break before. When the news had come about

Jean, she had sat wide-eyed and silent for an hour, and then had risen and gone about her usual tasks without mentioning his death. Pierre had lain wounded for days at Neuilly. She had made the long trip to see him and the finest smith in Brittany had gasped away his life in the arms that had first held him. She had journeyed back to the little gate-house of the Château de la Motte, dry-eyed and silent. But to-day, now that this last one of her brood was leaving her perhaps forever, the strong old heart could no longer bear its burden of grief.

"I'll come back, mother," he said huskily, "I'll come back a—a—sergeant."

"Much good that'll do without arms or legs," she grunted. "I've seen a lot like that!"

Jacques laughed uneasily.

"But not me, mother!"

"I was proud to think that you got away from them," she went on, "that they couldn't hold you, but I almost wish you were back."

Jacques looked at her heaving shoulders and tragic, withered face.

"When Pierre and Jean went, you didn't take on so."

"I didn't know what it was like then," she choked, "I didn't know what it was like!"

"I must go now, mother," he muttered.

The old woman tried bravely to smile into the young face.

"Can't you stay and have something to eat?" she begged.

Jacques was hungry, very hungry. His soul

yearned for the many good things his mother cooked.

"I wish I could," he said wistfully, "but it's orders."

Nanine threw her arms about his neck and rocked him back and forth.

"Be careful," she pleaded, "you're all I have. God bless you!"

The boy tore himself away.

"Good-bye, mother; be sure and give the note to Mam'selle," he called as he went through the long window into the garden. Nanine waved him a tearful good-bye, her apron held to her lips, her heart in her eyes. She watched him till he was out of sight.

What a bitter lot is woman's. The world belongs to men. For women it is only a meeting, a parting, a supreme joy for awhile, and then endless, hopeless tears. With a groan she turned heavily back into the room.

The note for her Mademoiselle must not be forgotten.

As she turned to the desk where it lay, Von Pfaffen came in. His face darkened.

"Here," he said roughly, "what are you doing?"

Nanine eyed him resentfully, her heavy Breton face flushing.

"Who are you to order me about?" she asked, in her coarsest peasant manner.

The man was furious at her insolence.

"You'll go out of here," he said, between his teeth; "this is no place for you!"

"*Nom d'un chien*," the old woman's voice rose in a tirade of abuse, her eyes blazed with anger; "I'll do what I please! You black coat!"

Von Pfaffen's face reddened under her insult.

"I'll teach you how to talk to your betters," he said with an oath, and crossing to her with a quick stride, he laid a rough hand on her shoulder.

She twisted under his clutch.

"You scum! You toad!" she screamed; "you leave me be——!"

Her strident, peasant voice carried out into the hall, and Madame came hurrying in.

"What is it?" she asked. "What is wrong?"

Nanine stopped her scolding and stood sullenly, while the man explained.

"I did not give her permission to come in here, Madame," he said, "and she refuses to go!"

"It is all right," said Madame quietly. "I told her to come and arrange the room. You were busy with the General. Go to Mademoiselle Paulette, Nanine, she is expecting you. Her commission has come. She wants you to help her with her costume."

The old woman started for the door, her anger at the butler making her forget for a moment the paper that Jacques had brought, and which lay on the desk.

The man opened the door. She went through heavily, turning just enough for him to see the sneer she flung at him as she left.

"Anything more, Madame?" he asked.

She shook her head, and he turned ungraciously, closing the door after him.

Madame stood for a moment by the table. Her heart was heavy. War is cruelest to women, for their wounds are of the soul; but Marie, opening the door, met a brave smile, kindly welcoming eyes. When

Paulette had left her, she had promised to try and rest, but it was impossible, and nervously she paced her room, her brain in a turmoil with the thoughts that harrassed her. Would her plan succeed?

It must! It must! There must be nothing to prevent it! She was filled with a breathless hope as the bewildering possibility became clear to her, that she might indeed become the instrument by means of which France was to be saved! The thought transfigured her, lifted her out of the doubt and agony which had surrounded her. To be of use to the one she loved, to save what was more to him than his life, was her mission. This accomplished, whatever happened to her was of no consequence.

There were so many things that might interfere with the success of her plan, Von Pfaffen might discover it, her note might fall into other hands. There was so little time, so much to be done. She realized that she must deliver her message as soon as possible. Perhaps he was waiting even now. She flung open her door and hurried down the stair and into the salon, but here was her husband's mother with her quiet smile and sweet, kind eyes, and on the little desk still lay the folded slip of paper that was so like the one she had placed there.

Madame's voice was compassionate as she looked into the white face.

"Come in, dear," she said. "You must try and compose yourself, your cheeks are pale. I think a walk in the garden would do us both good."

"You are so sweet to me, so kind!" murmured Marie. "I want you all to love me!"

Madame pressed her hand tenderly.

"We will, dear," she said. "You and Paulette and I will be alone for luncheon to-day. We can all learn to know each other better."

Marie looked at her wistfully.

"I do love you," she said earnestly; "no matter what happens, I want you to believe that."

Madame had divined her condition with the quick sense of the mother heart, and her kindness doubled.

"Come," she said, "and we can talk of our dear ones," but the girl was thinking of the little paper on the desk.

"I can't," she gasped, "I can't," and she shrank away.

Madame went to the bell.

"Come," she said, "Antoine shall bring us wraps. The morning air is cool."

Marie watched her, a prayer in her heart, to be able to do something to repay these people for the love they were giving her.

Presently Von Pfaffen opened the door. He shot a swift glance at the girl from under his heavy brows.

"Madame?" he asked, turning to his mistress.

"Bring the scarfs you will find in the entrance hall, Antoine."

As the man left the room, Marie sank breathlessly into a chair. Would she be able to carry out her plan? Would her pale cheeks, or anything in her manner, betray her to her tormentor's keen gaze?

Madame looked pityingly into the white face.

"Come dear, you break my heart with your tragic eyes. Remember, I am his mother!"

With a cry, the girl started to her feet, but Von Pfaffen opened the door, the scarfs over his arm, and again she subsided into her chair, waiting.

Madame took a filmy gray scarf and let him wrap it about her shoulders, and as she went toward the window, he came to Marie with the ostensible humility of a servant.

She rose to her feet, and forced herself toward this man whom she loathed.

As he slipped the wrap about her shoulders, he muttered under his breath:

"Well?"

And in a quick whisper she answered·

"On the desk!"

Madame at the window, turned.

"Coming, dear?" she asked, and as the man stepped aside Marie followed her out into the garden.

Von Pfaffen watched them disappear, then he turned hurriedly to the little desk, where he found the paper that told of Maurice's coming. Eagerly he seized it and held it close to his eyes, his face glowing with triumph.

" 'Sains—to-morrow—at daybreak,' " he read. "Ah, my Fatherland!" he breathed, then lifting his fist, shook it fiercely at his surroundings. "Now I am rid of all this!"

Triumphantly he went through the door, his shoulders squared, the cloak of the servant dropped forever.

CHAPTER XXXIV

When Nanine and Paulette came down the great stairway a few minutes later, the girl was trembling with excitement. She was dressed in the field uniform of an army nurse. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes feverishly bright. The letter telling of her commission had just reached her that morning and the long-prepared costume was donned for the first time.

"Are you sure you remember the message, Nanine?" she asked. "Tell me again what it said."

Patiently the old woman repeated the words.

"I have told you, dearie," she said, " 'Sains—to-morrow—at daybreak!' "

"Sains, that's not far away! But I must be sure, Nanine. I must be sure! I must see the note. Where is it? Where is it?"

Nanine crossed heavily to the little desk. Not finding what she sought, she uttered a sharp exclamation. The girl flew to her side.

"What is it, Nanine? What is it?" she cried fearfully.

The old woman looked up at her blankly.

"It's gone!" she gasped.

Paulette echoed her words, her eyes wide and frightened.

"Gone?"

Nanine rummaged frantically.

"Oh, my dearie," she wailed, "I put it here, a bit of paper with 'Sains—to-morrow—at daybreak' written on it. Where can it be? Where can it be?"

Paulette stood watching her breathlessly.

"Nanine," her voice shook, "there is something wrong!"

The old woman stopped in her search.

"Will harm come to him, dearie?" she quavered.

"Oh, Nanine," cried the girl, terror beating at her heart, "I don't know—I'm afraid!"

"*Mon petit chou!*" soothed the old woman. "What does the loss of the paper matter? I remember the words, 'Sains—to-morrow—at daybreak,'" but her deep breast rose and fell with some of the terror that was shaking her young mistress.

"Someone has stolen it!" said Paulette miserably. "What good does it do for you to remember? Maurice will be taken back to prison, perhaps shot!" The thought sent her hand to her throat in terror.

"Shot!" Nanine stared at her, frightened. "What shall we do?" she cried.

"We must get word to father."

In all Paulette's short life her father had always been her refuge in time of trouble. He would know what to do.

"Oh, Nanine, why didn't you bring it to me at once? Why didn't you?"

The old woman shook her head sadly. For the sake of those few last moments with her boy this new trouble had come upon them.

"Perhaps Madame can help us," she said; "let us ask her!"

"Where is she?" asked Paulette eagerly. "Go find her at once! I'll go to her room, she may be there!"

The old woman hurried out and Paulette had just

crossed the threshold into the shadows of the outer hall when, through the long window, came Marie. Paulette turned and watched her curiously as she went straight to the little desk.

The sunlight of the garden was still in Marie's eyes, and she did not see the girl standing in the doorway. One glance was enough to show her that the note was gone. The Fate of France was on the knees of the gods. She had done her best. Turning, she found herself facing Paulette, whose eyes blazed with rage and hatred.

"So," she cried, "it's you!"

Marie recoiled. For a moment she failed to recognize the girl in her nurse's garb. When she did, her face went white.

"I knew I suspected you with reason," went on Paulette furiously, "no one else could have taken it. No one would be interested. Here, we are all friends, working for each other, but you——" and at the scorn in her voice, Marie cowered away from her.

"Don't—please," she breathed.

Paulette shook her roughly by the shoulders.

"Where is it?" she cried, "the paper that was here; where is it?"

Marie's heart stopped beating. What could Paulette know of the paper?

"God!" she gasped.

Her sister-in-law looked at her, sorrow struggling with hate.

"Why did you? Why did you?" she asked. "What have I done? What has Maurice done?"

Marie leaned away from her in astonishment.

"Maurice?" she asked.

"My sweetheart," went on Paulette, "in a German prison. He was to escape! You have stolen the note telling where he is to be. What have you done with it?"

Marie started. In a flash she understood that she and Paulette were thinking of different things. Von Pfaffen had undoubtedly found her own note. But if there had been two notes? Would this not create confusion and suspicion in his mind and so defeat her plan after all?

"Listen," she said hurriedly, "I did not take it! I swear I did not take it. If someone has it, we must get there before it is too late! We must save Maurice. Where is he?"

"How can I trust you?" began Paulette bitterly.

For a long moment the two women stared at each other. At last Marie spoke.

"Tell me—where is he?" she repeated. "Tell me, or you will regret it all your life!"

There was something so convincing in the tone of her voice that Paulette found herself believing in spite of herself. Unconsciously their positions were changed; it was Marie who now stood firm and sure of herself, Paulette who trembled.

"He will be at Sains—to-morrow—at daybreak," she whispered.

Marie's eyes slowly dilated, her face froze into the expression of an ancient Greek tragic mask. From the depths of her very soul came a groan of anguish. Tensely she repeated the words:

"Sains—to-morrow—at daybreak!"

She had thought her plan so sure, so certain to aid her husband's cause, but whichever way she turned, she seemed doomed to bring misery to those she loved. She knew that Von Pfaffen was already well on his way to the enemy. The words she had written were stamped on her memory. What evil spirit had made her choose Sains? Sains, where to-morrow at daybreak, Paulette's sweetheart, having risked his life for liberty, would only be reaching this haven of safety as the guns of the enemy were turned against its walls.

Paulette looked at her, frightened.

"What is it?" she whispered. At last Marie spoke, the words coming through her stiff lips in jerking, staccato tones:

"You must go to him," she said; "you must go now, at once."

Go to him herself! The thought staggered her. The difficulty! The danger! The horrible country she must cross before she should arrive at Sains, where battles were even now raging!

"Oh, how can I go?" she cried, covering her eyes. "Out there in the midst of all those horrors! How can I?"

"There is no time to lose," urged Marie, "you are going to the man you love."

Slowly Paulette lifted her brown head.

"Can I? Dare I?" she murmured.

In the distance she could hear the sound of the guns, which all morning had been growing louder and louder, sometimes swelling into a roar which seemed to shake the very earth.

Marie put her hand on her arm, her whole body vibrating with emotion.

"Listen," she said, "the Germans are to make an attack on Sains to-morrow at daybreak!"

Paulette uttered a cry.

"How do you know this? What are you? *Who* are you?"

"Don't ask me how I know," went on Marie, "don't ask me anything, only for God's sake go to Sains! Warn the town! Warn the commanding General! O hurry, hurry, there is not a moment to lose!"

Paulette stared at her fiercely, her hatred and distrust returning and blazing from her eyes.

"I knew you were a spy," she cried. "I knew I hated you with reason. Tell me how you know this, tell me, tell me!"

Into Marie's heart came a great sadness, her punishment was beginning. How could this girl believe her? Would anyone ever trust her?

"Your note was stolen," she said. "The one who has it is taking it to the enemy! I know! I tried to help my husband's cause, but in doing so I have endangered Maurice's life. Oh, Paulette, I thought that what I did was for the best. Don't look at me like that. Some day you will understand!"

Paulette was wild with rage. This woman whom they had made one of themselves, whom her parents had taken to their hearts and given the position due the wife of their beloved son, had betrayed them. But there was a punishment for such as she.

"I'll have you shot," she panted. "I'll have the

soldiers drag you to prison for the spy that you are——" but Marie was at her side.

"Paulette," she said earnestly, "will you allow your hatred and distrust of me to stand in the way of doing a great service for France and saving Maurice? There is no doubt that the Germans will attack Sains to-morrow at dawn. I need not tell you what it would mean to your countrymen to know this and prepare for their coming. If you do not heed me, you will never know happiness again! This is the opportunity of your whole life to serve the cause you love. Do not cast it aside! Go to Sains! Save the city! Save your love, then come back and do whatever you will to me, only, for God's sake, hurry!"

Her voice was so earnest, so vibrant with the desire that prompted her, that in spite of her suspicion the girl paused and looked into her eyes.

"If I could only trust you," she said.

Quick to sense the momentary lowering of the barriers, Marie put a pleading hand on her arm.

"You can," she said, "oh, do believe me. The cause you love is as dear to me as to you. You must go, there is no other way!" Her eyes rested on the little insignia on the collar of the girl's costume, and mentally following her gaze, Paulette became suddenly aware of her uniform. This would be the means of reaching Maurice. Her hands would nurse him after all. He would be her first patient.

Her eyes cleared of the vision of blood and terror, the hatred and distrust died in her heart. Her shoulders squared with the strength of her father, her chin lifted with her mother's poise.

"I'll go," she said. "I am a soldier's daughter! I am to be a soldier's bride! I'll go!"

"Go now," urged Marie; "it isn't far. I swear I didn't take it. Won't you believe me? It isn't your happiness that is threatened. Oh, believe me! Believe me!"

"If I am only in time," breathed Paulette, as she turned to go.

Marie followed her to the window.

"Little sister," she pleaded, "you at least I would save unhappiness. God speed!" and suddenly, believing, Paulette turned and flung her arms about her neck, then with her head held high, she went out through the garden.

Marie watched her go. How many partings there had been in these short hours. She watched Nanine close and bar the heavy gates after the slender figure, drying her eyes with the back of her hand as she did so.

" 'Sains—to-morrow—at dawn!" the words were burned into her brain. Her head went down on her arms across the little desk.

From the depths of the garden, Madame saw the girl go through the gate, and hurried into the salon. Her quick step in the hall roused Marie. She rose to meet her.

"She has gone, *ma mère*," she told her gently; "she has gone to the man she loves."

"Gone—my little Paulette, gone? Out there, without a word to me," her face was suddenly old, gray, the lines about her mouth seemed drawn with a shaded pencil.

"A message came this morning," said Marie; "it told of Maurice's escape. Someone has intercepted it, and Paulette, fearing for his safety, has gone to him."

"We have been waiting for this message," said Madame, "but Paulette, alone! Out there!" She looked toward the horizon from whence came the deep-throated roar of the guns, savage and menacing.

Quite suddenly she broke down. Bowing her proud head in her hands she wept bitterly.

Marie stood beside her, silent, until just as suddenly she gained control of herself again. The white head rose proudly, the bright brown eyes shone bravely through their tears.

"I am glad she has gone," she said. "I would not have it otherwise. She must go to help the man she loves, if she can! I'm glad she was brave enough to go."

Marie looked at her wonderingly. How fine she was, how strong and true. Why could she not have been as brave as this? She saw herself as she had been, a pitiful, weak creature, almost ready to sell her soul to tie herself like a millstone about the neck of the man she loved. She knew that even now she was dreading the scorn she would see in this kind face when she knew all the truth concerning her. But she thought of Gerome, with his lofty ideals; she thought of Paulette forgetting her dread of the horrors "out there," taking her young life into her hands willingly, eagerly, to serve, if she could, both France and the man she loved, and she knew that she, too, would accept her martyrdom gladly for the cause that was theirs.

CHAPTER XXXV

The long road that led through the village and on into Sains lay before Paulette like an unexplored country. The familiar smoothness was gone, cut into by heavy army wagons and many marching feet. The fields themselves that bordered its dusty edges were trampled and bare. Even the tall poplars, standing like sentinels along its way, were draggled and unkempt.

When the gates closed on her, Paulette drew a quick breath as she looked about her. How often she had ridden through the green shadows of these familiar lanes with Maurice; now the difference frightened her.

She turned to look at the gray towers where they showed above the trees. Would she ever see them again, she wondered? Poor little Paulette, the way before her was a long and weary one, but she knew if she were only in time nothing else mattered.

Resolutely she turned her face away from her beloved home and started on her journey. The muffled roar of the guns which had been coming to them ever since the war began seemed deeper, more menacing now that she was outside the shelter of the château walls, but until she neared the village, the road was deserted. She hurried down the pretty little street that wound among the houses. Here and there soldiers lounged against the doorsteps and gazed curiously at her under their caps. Once she flattened

herself against a wall to let a company swing by through the narrow street. Once she stumbled out of the way of an automobile filled with officers. Once a woman leaned out of an upper window and waved to her as she passed, but without turning her head Paulette hurried on.

At the tiny railroad station she found the platform crowded with soldiers, a detachment of men waiting to be sent along the line. The officer in charge, a tall smooth-faced youngster, greeted her politely. She showed him her orders and begged to be allowed to stop off at Sains. He piloted her down the platform, alongside of which there stood little gray box-cars. Out of the windows crowded round heads, black, brown, yellow; laughing, joking, smoking.

But with all the willingness in the world, there was no corner for her, and she was just turning away disappointed when a gray motor ambulance came alongside the platform. The driver called out, seeing her uniform:

"There's room for you," he said cheerily, reaching out a helping hand.

"I have an important message for the commanding officer at Sains," said Paulette. "Will you take me there as quickly as possible?"

She climbed up to the seat beside him. The ambulance turned about and as it swung into top speed the soldiers in the little cars waved their caps to them.

The driver and his orderly laughed and joked as the machine sped along and tried to draw her into

their conversation, quite as though it were a pleasure excursion they were having.

Outside the village the road wound steeply up a hill and then dipped in a great curve down to the river bank.

She began to see more and more frequently the work of the guns which up to now she had only heard. Deep furrows cut into the fields by exploding shells, ruined barns with great gaping holes in their sides, farm houses, roofless, with empty, staring windows. She could see the dust of the supply trains crawling along the horizon, and occasionally the white cloud of a bursting shell.

Presently the ambulance drew up at a field hospital. Nurses robed like herself hurried from one to another of the shattered forms lying in the straw. Doctors with tired faces went silently to and fro. Paulette's heart shrank from the suffering about her, she tried to shut from her eyes the pitiful sights, to close her ears to the moans and cries, but they beat against her strained nerves, almost breaking them.

This ambulance was to go no further. But there was a constant stream going on toward Sains. Into one of these she climbed and in a moment they were speeding on their way again, past long lines of soldiers, some resting by the road, others trudging rhythmically along, their faces turned toward the sound of the guns. The line seemed unending. These were the men who were standing between France and unthinkable disaster.

How proud she was of them! Her courage re-

turned. Her nostrils dilated. They represented France, and she was one of them!

This message that she bore might enable them to inflict a blow upon the enemy that would sweep him from her beloved country forever!

At last, the distant spires of Sains came in sight, and her heart was full of the hope that she might not be too late.

Back at the château, a mother's heart was following her with a prayer for her safety and another woman paced restlessly up and down, pausing frequently at the window to look with straining eyes toward Sains, hoping, praying with her whole soul that she would reach there in time.

At Draise, not many miles away, a great army was gathering quietly, secretly, waiting for the dawn and success, while here, toward the ancient spires which were their guide, another army in field gray and spiked helmets was directing its guns; and between them, on the long stretch of dusty road, cut and slashed by army wagons and many marching feet, the ambulance sped the girl on her way, the love of one of this world of men filling her heart, a prayer on her lips that the message she carried might bring victory.

When they drew up at the gates of Sains, Paulette's new uniform was dusty and soiled. The tall spires of the cathedral and the red roofs of the houses sparkled in the afternoon sunshine as she entered the town. Here and there the walls lay in crumbling heaps, reminders of the German shells. Near the gate several soldiers were lounging. One man, his cap pulled low over his eyes, his rifle against his shoulder, paced back and forth.

The sergeant in command approached her.

"Where do you wish to go, Mademoiselle?" he asked politely.

"I must go to Headquarters. I am to see the officer in command there. It is very important!"

The sergeant called one of the men.

"Guerin," he said, "conduct this lady to Headquarters. See that she is taken care of. Understand?"

The man saluted.

"This way, Mademoiselle," he said, and they hurried down one street, across another, and through a ruined archway, riddled by German shot. Sometimes they were obliged to scramble over heaps of brick and mortar and broken glass where some shell had struck. Presently they came out into the marketplace. The broad, open space was deserted, save for the sentries pacing to and fro. Around the fountain in the center were piled heavy burlap bags, evidently filled with grain. The Hotel de Ville, which formed one side of the square, had part of its roof gone, and a heap of dust and mortar lay piled against one side. The Cathedral, opposite, whose spires had been their guide all day, was battered and crumpled, a great empty space where the beautiful glass of the rose window had been.

At the door of the Hotel de Ville a sentry challenged them. There was a whispered word with her guide. The man looked at her sharply and saluted.

"Pass, Mademoiselle," he said.

They stumbled up a dark stair, and across a wide, dusty hall lined with doors, closed and bolted for the

most part. At the far end, Guerin bade her halt and rapped loudly on the panel of a door standing partly ajar.

"*Entrez,*" called a hoarse voice, and he pushed it open with a jerk of his elbow and motioned her to enter.

Paulette stepped across the threshold.

In the middle of the room a man with thick iron-gray hair was writing at a table. At his side stood an orderly waiting, and under a window a young officer sat before a telegraph instrument.

He rose as they entered and came forward.

"Well?" he said and Guerin saluted stiffly.

"I am the daughter of General de la Motte. I have important information for the commanding officer," began Paulette.

He glanced at her keenly for a moment, then turned to the man at the table.

"General," he said, "Mademoiselle de la Motte has something of importance to say to you!"

The iron-gray head lifted and Paulette saw a finely formed face with a firm, resolute mouth and a pair of very keen steel-gray eyes.

He rose and bowed.

"Mademoiselle de la Motte? By any chance of the family of General Phillipe de la Motte?"

"His daughter, sir!"

A bright smile lighted his face, relieving it of all its sternness. He extended his hand.

"This is a great pleasure, Mademoiselle," he said; "pray be seated and tell me what I can do for you!"

"Thank you," she said, "but I prefer to stand.

What I have to tell you is very important!" She paused for a moment and the General fixed his keen eyes upon hers. "I have just come from the château. I received information this morning that the enemy is to attack Sains to-morrow at daybreak."

The General was a man long schooled to mask his emotions, and his face gave no sign except a barely perceptible tightening of the muscles about the mouth and a deeper gleam in his clear eyes.

"This is important, Mademoiselle. Are you sure that it is authentic?"

"I have every reason to believe so, Monsieur."

"How long have you known it?" he asked.

"Just a few hours," she said. "I came here as fast as I could!"

"You say you received this information at the château this morning?" She bowed. "Can you tell me how this became known to you?"

"I regret, Monsieur, that I am not at liberty to do so!"

"How many others know of this?"

"One other, Monsieur."

"The source of your information?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

He looked searchingly into her eyes.

"Are you sure this other is loyal to our cause?"

The girl paused. Through her mind ran the events of the past few hours.

Her brother's wife was of the enemy's blood. She had hated and distrusted her, and this morning her suspicions had seemed to be confirmed. Was she

sure of her loyalty? Marie's eyes seemed to look into hers. Again she heard her voice saying,

"The cause you love is as dear to me as to you!"

She raised her eyes to the General's.

"The other is loyal!" she said.

He turned from her and paced the room thoughtfully, his hands behind his back, his brows contracted.

"If what you say is true," he said at last, pausing before her, "then you have done France a great service. Wait here a moment." He crossed the room, and spoke in an undertone to the officer in waiting, who saluted and went out, accompanied by the orderly. Then he turned to Paulette, smiling. "In the name of France, I thank you, Mademoiselle, for what you have done to-day. Can I be of any service to you?"

Paulette looked at him piteously.

"Is there any news of Captain le Cerf?" she asked eagerly. "We have had word that he had escaped from Belgium and was to arrive here to-day. He is my fiance, Monsieur."

The General smiled kindly.

"I congratulate you, Mademoiselle," he said; "the Captain and his family are dear friends of mine. I have good news for you! He has arrived safely."

He touched a bell and an orderly entered. There was a whispered word or two, and the man, saluting, left the room.

Paulette's eyes glowed. All sense of fatigue left her. She would see him soon. Her heart throbbed suffocatingly.

The General looked at her benevolently. With a

Frenchman's love of romance which is never absent, even in the face of grave danger, he watched the flush on her cheeks, her parted lips, and with a sigh for his own lost youth, he picked up his pen again and bent over his writing.

Presently, heavy steps came down the hall and a knock at the door.

"Come in," called the General without raising his head, and the young officer reentered, followed by a slim figure in a soiled uniform.

Paulette leaped to her feet. With a cry she flew across the room and into the arms of Maurice. His drawn face was almost as gray as his eyes, his shoulders thin, though now squared with hope and determination, his cheeks hollow and heavily lined. There were purple shadows under his eyes and his hands shook pitifully as he caressed her hair.

The General patted his shoulder.

"Sit down, Captain," he said kindly; "you're not strong yet, sit down," and Maurice let them lead him to a chair.

Paulette knelt beside him, her arms about his neck.

"Maurice, Maurice, I've missed you so," she murmured; "you're not going to leave me ever again!"

He held his lips tenderly against her forehead.

General de Line stood looking down on them.

"Captain," he said, "do you think you are strong enough to travel to-night? I must get you both away from Sains as soon as possible."

Something in his tone made Maurice look up at him inquiringly.

"We have had news that the enemy are to attack

here at dawn, you must be safely away by then. That is the least France can do in return for the service Mademoiselle has rendered," and he bowed gallantly to the girl.

Maurice looked from one to the other not understanding.

"Mademoiselle will explain," said the General, smiling.

Maurice put his feeble arms close about the girl's trembling shoulders.

"My dearest one," he murmured, "I am so proud to know that you have served France. You must tell me everything. We must be married at once! And then, are you willing to go with me, wreck that I am, wherever I go?"

She looked at him adoringly.

"How can you ask me?" she cried; "don't you know?"

Le Cerf rose shakily to his feet.

"My General," he said, "Mademoiselle and I are to be married at once, if you can make it possible to have the *curé* here, and then——"

"And then," finished the General with a fatherly smile, "you will go with Captain Merton to Calais; he drives there within the hour with these despatches. You will cross to England where your parents are. I have a letter from them. They write they have taken a house, and, of course, are most anxious to see you. You will stay with them until you are strong."

Maurice's eyes held Paulette's.

"Will you?" he asked.

She looked down at her nurse's uniform.

"I have been ordered to St. Quentin for duty," she faltered.

The General broke in hastily:

"I will adjust that, my dear young lady," he said kindly.

A quick vision of her mother, her father, her home, flashed across her mind, but she looked up into Maurice's eyes, infinite love in hers. Where he was, was home to her. He needed her. She asked herself no further questions.

She went through the hurried marriage like one in a dream. She was scarcely conscious of the black-frocked *curé*, of the General standing on one side of him, and Maurice who had left her so short a time ago, strong and virile, shaking against her arm.

She scarcely remembered the words or their responses; she had a dim recollection of the closing lines of the ceremony, of Maurice's lips on hers. Then came the quick run down the dark stairs and into the waiting car, the wild flight through the growing dusk and into the deepening night, stopping every now and then to answer the challenging sentries. She dared not think of what the morning would bring. She could only hope that the message she had brought had been in time to be of service. Her memory still held the vivid picture of her sister-in-law's agonized face when she had hurried her off to Sains. How could Marie have known, she wondered? Who had it been in their own loyal household who had stolen the note? Her head ached with the endless repetition of her questions to which she could find no answer.

She looked down on the dear head pillowed on her arm and drew the heavy army blanket closer about them both, thanking God that he was safe.

Toward dawn they came in sight of Calais. The tall, ugly spires of Notre Dame showed gray against the brightening sky. There was a brief pause at the gates of the fortress, a short parley with some soldiers and one or two keen-eyed officers—another quick dash across the Place d'Arme to the New Harbor.

Captain Merton shook their hands cheerily as he left them.

With the heavy army blanket as their only luggage, they boarded the boat for Dover.

Her face was turned away from France, the water slipping under the keel of the Channel boat was carrying her from everything she had ever loved, carrying her and the man who was to fill her life from now on, into a strange land.

When she had wrapped Maurice in the warm folds, Paulette sat with his hands close clasped in hers. Just as the first rays of the morning sun sparkled on the white cliffs of Dover, showing vaguely on the horizon eighteen miles away across the Channel, borne on the fresh salt breeze, came a deep-throated, far-away roar. She stiffened in her chair and bent her ear to listen.

The attack had come! But her warning would render it futile. Her trust in Marie was vindicated.

Her heart swelled with pride. Her lips murmured a prayer of thankfulness, her fingers clung closer to the feeble ones they held. For the first time in many months she was at peace.

CHAPTER XXXVI

In the château, Madame and Marie, together with the old Breton woman, were the only ones left. After Paulette's departure they searched for Antoine, but found that he had gone, as Marie knew he would be.

The long day had worn away somehow. Madame went up to her room and shut herself in. Marie's nerves, almost at the breaking-point, sent her feverishly wandering about the house and grounds, up and down and back and forth, never seeming to find a place to rest. Once or twice she came back to the gate-house and tried to talk to Angéle, but the girl, her eyes red and swollen, her face mottled with weeping, splashed and scrubbed the already immaculate floor in a frenzy of industry, her conversation limited to monosyllables, and Marie turned back again to her own room.

She had brought with her from Paris materials for the little *layette* that would be needed, but her hands shook so over the tiny garments that the needle ran deeply into her finger and the blood stained the white linen. She stared at the red spot with wild eyes. What a horrible omen, she thought, what a frightful thing. Blood stains on her baby's clothes! Did that mean that her efforts at reparation had come too late?

She threw aside the bit of linen as though it scorched her fingers, and fell on her knees in agony.

"Holy Mother," she began. Surely the blessed

Virgin would hear a woman who longed so sincerely to right whatever wrong she had done.

When she rose from her knees it was with renewed courage and hope. The one poignant remorse that stabbed her was that when Gerome had told her of his love, she had not bared to him her life in Vienna. How much sorrow, how many endless days of regret are caused by the first deception practised from a false sense of pride or for the purpose of hiding some truth about ourselves which if disclosed might cause us at the time embarrassment, or pain. Often whatever is gained is paid for a hundredfold by the humiliation and grief that follows when the truth must be told.

To Marie, pacing her room, came the full realization of this. If she had only confided in Gerome, he might have forgiven her and they would have been almost as happy as they had been, without this dreadful suffering being possible. She could then have denounced Von Pfaffen when she had found herself face to face with him again.

The burning tears coursed down her cheeks, and with all her soul she prayed to be given the opportunity to tell her husband everything.

Toward evening Madame knocked at her door.

"Let us go down to the salon, dear," she said. "I shall bring little Angéle up to the house and we will stay together to-night."

"Yes, *Maman*," answered Marie, through the door; "I shall be down directly."

As Madame's footsteps died away, she hastily smoothed her hair and refreshed her face with water,

then went downstairs to join the others in the long vigil that was before them.

All night long the voice of the guns rose in deafening crescendo, making sleep impossible, while on the horizon, orange, crimson, and mauve flashes broke the darkness.

All night long the four women sat together in the little salon, waiting for what they dared not put into words.

Madame sat silent and tragic in her great chair, her delicate hands clasped loosely in her lap. Her eyes looked far away, beyond to-night, beyond to-morrow, even beyond this world.

Angéle whimpered in her corner.

Marie staring from one to the other, wondered what they would say when they knew everything.

The roar of the guns was incessant, rolling, thundering, like mighty waves beating against granite cliffs, deafening, appalling, filling all the air with an agony of sound. Then just before dawn, suddenly, as though a giant hand had intervened, the tumult ceased and was followed by a breathless hush. The women looked at one another. There was something in this unusual stillness that was ominous, fearful, more terrible than had been the pandemonium of sound.

Far away a cock crowed and was answered by another. The wind stirred among the leaves and set them to whispering. Then they heard a distant, intermittent rattle, sharp, spiteful, venomous, unmistakable to anyone who had ever heard it. It was the sound of rifles and machine guns. Instantly they

understood. That which shot and shell had begun, the bayonet was to finish. The artillery had ceased, to permit the men to come out of the trenches! To go over the top! To charge!

As the light grew, the staccato rattle of the distant rifle fire was interrupted every now and again by a dull boom. The enemy was answering.

Several times a terrible detonation roared in their ears, the windows shook with the concussion, the very rafters of the old château shivered and trembled, and across the fields a great column of black smoke and dirt spouted wildly in the air where a shell had struck and burst.

Madame, standing tall and erect by the window, vibrated with every sound of the distant battle. She was fighting by the side of her men, this woman, reared in luxury, in whose veins ran the blood of her country's best, whose indomitable will lifted her above all difficulties, leveled all obstacles and knew no fear. A worthy mother of a noble son!

Old Nanine sat dry-eyed, seemingly unconscious of the sounds of the conflict about them. Centuries of passive obedience, of unreasoning sacrifice, had left its heritage of outward indifference. Stolid, emotionless, she waited, but in the core of her heart burned the unquenchable flame of mother-love for the last son, out there, where flesh and blood was holding its unequal contest against steel and iron.

Silent, with white cheeks, and lips tightly compressed sat Marie, every nerve strained taut, as her imagination carried her into the battle. Each shot that was fired seemed aimed at her own heart, each

sound in the air shrieked aloud of some calamity to Gerome. She knew that she would gladly have undergone whatever tortures could be given her to know that he would come back to her, maimed, torn, bleeding, no matter how, but only come back to her!

As the reverberations grew louder and more terrifying, she rose to her feet, and went to the window beside Madame.

"God give them victory!" she breathed at last.

Madame stared at the ridge of the hill where the road wound over to Draise.

"My husband is there," she said, with calm exultation, "my brothers are there; my son is there."

Marie flung out her arms, an agony of longing in her eyes.

"Gerome," she cried, "Gerome!"

"And somewhere out among it all," went on Madame, in that strange, vibrant voice, her eyes never leaving the horizon, "somewhere out there is my little Paulette, my baby, gone from our shelter to the man she loves."

"She is taking to him much more than her love!" murmured Marie, but Madame did not seem to hear her.

"And now," she said, wondering, "even Antoine is gone!"

Marie closed her eyes with a shudder of horror. Antoine! How she loathed even the mention of his name. His going had brought about all this! For the thousandth time she asked herself if it would not have been better to have denounced him at once.

"Antoine left without a word, without a sign.

Even he must fight for his country," went on Madame's steady voice.

Marie rose to her feet and paced up and down the room.

"When will it be over?" she cried. "When will it be over?"

Madame turned her eyes from the ridge which lay incongruously sparkling in the early sunshine, while the air shook with the terrific thunder of the guns, shouting their message of death and destruction.

"We women must watch and wait," she said. "Daughters of men! Wives of men! Mothers of men!"

Marie stopped in her restless pacing.

"Mothers of men!" she whispered. When the day of reckoning came, what would she say to Gerome's child, if it should be a son? Would he be able to look into her eyes with pride, or would her memory be hateful to him?

Madame looked at her with tender understanding.

"It is for that, dear," she said, "we women must watch and wait!"

To watch and wait! If that were all! This great struggle must end some day. And to each of these women would be given her measure of sorrow. The agony of suspense would be over.

But for her it was different.

No matter what the consequences were of her effort to circumvent the enemy, the fact of her having withheld the truth from her husband might never cease to bear its harvest of evil.

She threw herself face down again on the couch,

her shoulders heaving convulsively, her slight frame torn with the bitterness of her sorrow.

Nanine looked at her stolidly.

"There are others of us," she said, "who have our griefs."

"Poor Nanine," said Madame sympathetically, "you have given two sons, and now the youngest, Jacques, is out there!"

The old woman's eyes were dry, her face was set.

"Yes, Madame," she said; "what are women for? In peaceful times the country takes our money for the army, and when war comes we must give our men who've earned the money!"

Marie lifted herself from among the pillows and stared at her wonderingly through her red, swollen lids.

"And you'd give all?" she asked, "everything you care for, everything, for your country?"

"But yes," the old woman's answer was a matter of course; "what else is there to do?"

"We all would!" Madame spoke with the voice of France. "Our men are not fighting for material gain, but in defense of our homes. The enemy's heel is on the breast of our beloved country, and to remove his hated tread that defaces our sacred soil, we will give our loved ones to the last man!"

Her words woke in Marie's heart the eager, breathless emotion that comes into being with the sound of martial music.

"I'm beginning to understand what all that means," she said. "This wonderful love that came to me seemed greater than anything in the world; it made

me happier than I ever dreamed of being. If this cause for which he is fighting is more glorious, I want to give him to it. I want to make the sacrifice. But oh, it's hard, it's terribly hard!"

Madame put her arm about the shaking shoulders.

"You are not strong," she said, gently smoothing the girl's hair as she let her weep against her shoulder. After a moment she went on, "Don't you think that I know the wonder, the beauty of a great love? Don't you think I realize what it means? Every woman does, from Nanine here, and little Angéle, to the greatest queen, but each of us sees it differently. Real love is unselfish, it makes you want to give as well as receive. It will not let you choke with clinging arms!"

The old woman had followed her mistress' words with wonder, not understanding, but feeling the thought that lay back of them with the intuition of universal womanhood.

"Even when a poor peasant woman like me cares for her man like I cared for mine," she said, "you fight for him, with him, but you don't hang onto his coat-tails when he wants to fight for himself."

Madame rose and crossed to the window, where she stood looking in the direction from whence came the incessant thunder of the guns.

"I'd rather have my boy die out there," she said proudly, "fighting in defense of his country, than to know he did not have the will to go."

Marie stumbled across the room and threw herself at Madame's feet, her arms about her knees.

"You wonderful woman," she cried. "*His* mother, can you forgive me? How different everything would have been if my own mother had lived!"

Madame tried to raise her.

"Marie dear," she pleaded, "don't; there is nothing you have done, excepting love my boy too much. Come, don't ask my forgiveness for that!" but Marie clung about her knees, still weeping bitterly.

"You don't know," she sobbed, "you can't know how much I love him! And I am so unworthy!"

Madame stooped and lifted her to her feet.

"You must not feel unhappy because you are of our enemies' blood," she said; "no one questions your loyalty to our cause!"

But Marie covered her ears to shut out the sounds that grew louder and louder every minute, and sank miserably into a chair.

Angéle's fingers were busy again with her rosary, her lips with a prayer, and old Nanine crossed herself.

At the window Madame stood watching, her soul in her eyes. Over the brow of the hill long lines of gray motors were crawling, on the sides of which she could just make out a blood-red cross.

A spasm of pain touched her heart. The never-ending line of ambulances, what agony, what misery they carried. An hour ago splendid young manhood, now shattered wrecks!

And going in the opposite direction swung a long blue column of marching men. Strong, virile, filled with courage! Forward! Onward! For France!

Faintly, through the dull roaring, came the sound of the Marseillaise.

She stretched out her arms to them in an ecstasy of patriotism. Her voice clear and sweet as a bugle.

"March on," she cried. "March on—to victory or death!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

The morning wore on. The firing grew nearer, louder, more insistent. Madame, watching at the window, suddenly uttered a cry. The others rushed to her side.

Outside on the road an ambulance had stopped, gone on again, and through the gates came two soldiers bearing a stretcher.

Slowly, tenderly, they carried their burden toward the house.

The women stared through the window with an agony of apprehension, each with the name of the one she loved best trembling on her lips. Was it Gerome—the General—Jacques?

The men entered through the long window the women opened for them, and laid their burden on the couch. As they did so, the fainting man revived and lifted his head. With a cry Nanine stumbled to his side.

"Jacques! Jacques! Couldn't I save one of the three?"

The boy turned his eyes toward her.

"I'm all right, mother," he said bravely.

The old woman fondled him, the slow tears following the wrinkles down her cheeks.

"My boy," she cried, brokenly, "my last one; is it bad?"

He turned his head on the cushion she had placed under it.

"I'm a sergeant, mother," he murmured, his eyes lighting up.

Little Angéle was standing staring down at him, her pretty mouth quivering, her breast fluttering. She was afraid, somehow, to speak, to call his attention to herself.

Marie looked on helplessly, with a feeling of detachment. She felt as one in a dream. These men who had stared death in the face within so brief a time, seemed unreal to her.

Madame turned to one of the stretcher-bearers.

"What is happening out there?" she asked.

He looked at her, his eyes, in his square, mud-plastered face, bloodshot from lack of sleep.

"We don't know, Madame," he said, removing his cap; "we can't tell, we can only hope."

She turned to the other man and recoiled slightly.

He wore the field-gray uniform of a German private soldier. His face was pale and expressionless, a red stubble covered his cheeks and chin. Under one eye was a gash with the blood blackened on it and surrounded by purple discolorations. There was a bloody rag around his closely cropped head, and his spiked helmet sat upon this in a grotesquely jaunty fashion.

"What is this man doing here?" she asked.

"He is a prisoner, Madame." The orderly hunched an expressive shoulder toward Jacques, "he helped bring him in."

Madame's eyes were on the bloody bandage.

"You are hurt, too," she said.

The man smiled, a wan, crooked smile.

"Yes, Madame," he said in guttural French. "It is not serious." The orderly frowned as he looked from one to the other.

"They both need patching up," he said; "can you get water and bandages and perhaps something to eat?"

Nanine was still bending over Jacques, and Angéle, too, was on her knees beside the couch as Madame turned to go.

Marie touched her arm.

"Let me help," she said.

"Yes, dear, you go," she said softly. It would do the girl good, she thought, to be occupied in this service. "Bring water and some food."

Suddenly the pale face of the German soldier went a shade whiter, he staggered a step toward the couch and put out a shaking hand to steady himself. Nanine, suspicious of his uniform, made a quick gesture of protection over her wounded son, but the boy looked up quickly.

"He's all right, mother," he said; "he's my friend."

"Your friend," said Madame in astonishment. To these women the uniform this man was wearing was symbolic of everything barbarous.

Jacques held up a feeble hand and clasped the one the German held out to him.

"I wouldn't be here, if it weren't for him," he said brokenly. "We charged early this morning. We reached their first trench. I got this," he laid his free hand on his side. "I didn't know anything for

awhile. When I came to, the rest of our boys had gone on and left me behind. God, I was thirsty—I tried to crawl——" the horror of it all twisted his face in an agony of memory.

"Hush, *mon lapin,* hush," whispered his mother, but the boy went on:

"I tried to crawl," he panted; "I couldn't! Over me, around me, beside me—dead bodies—everywhere——" He tightened his grasp on the German's hand; "then he dragged himself over to me—he had some water—I believe I got most of it—he opened his kit and gave me first aid——"

Madame looked on in astonishment.

"One of the enemy to do such a thing!" she wondered. It was incredible to think that two men who only so short a time before had been striving for each other's lives should now call one another "friend."

Through the door came Marie with a tray of bread and coffee, and a basin of water and some bandages.

The German put his hand against the bloody rag about his head.

"We are not enemies now," he said in his guttural French, "only fellow-sufferers!"

"Fellow-sufferers," Marie echoed the words from the depth of her heart, as she handed the man a cup of the hot coffee.

The German took it with a polite bow.

"You are good to me," he said simply.

"In spite of the uniform you wear," said Madame, "we will do our best for you."

He shook his head sadly.

"It is our countries who are at war," he said, "not we!"

Marie's eyes turned toward the far horizon where the rumble of the guns still thundered unceasingly.

"It is the countries who are at war," she echoed, "and between them men's bodies and women's hearts are broken!"

Jacques was lying on his pillow, white-faced and with closed lids.

His mother leaned back on her heels and looked at him.

"Yes," she said, and her voice broke, "it is the people who suffer."

Her mistress' white head raised itself proudly.

"Here in France," she said, "the people and the country are one. We are fighting to preserve that unity."

For a moment there was silence, then Marie turned to fill the German prisoner's cup.

"Oh, the pity of it all," she said under her breath.

The man caught her words.

"You are right, Madame," he said, "war is pitiful! It is terrible and it is unnecessary!"

Madame looked at him wonderingly.

"You speak our language well," she said. The tales of German efficiency, their ability to do all things, had not been exaggerated.

"I was one of the professors of languages at Heidelburg," he said wistfully. "I thought to spend my life in instruction, not destruction."

Jacques stirred at his voice.

"He was good to me, mother," he muttered.

"Yes, yes, *mon chéri*," soothed Nanine. "I know! Lie quietly!"

As she spoke the thunder of the guns seemed to come nearer. The women shuddered and the orderly shook his head.

"We seem to be getting in range," he said. "I advise you all to leave this place, and go further to the rear."

Nanine's eyes were on her son.

"How can we move him?" she asked.

"Where can we go?" questioned Madame.

The orderly went to the door and peered out.

"He will be all right," he said. "I'll hail one of the passing ambulances. It can take us all in." He left the room and hurried down the driveway to the gate.

Angéle had Jacques' head against her breast now, and old Nanine rose to her feet.

"Oh, Madame," she pleaded, "let us go quickly. I must save this one."

Her mistress looked about at the house and garden where she had spent so many happy years, and which, the loud roars of bursting shells warned her, might be laid in ruins at any moment.

"Very well," she said resignedly, "the General will know we have tried to reach safety. He will understand."

The orderly at the gate had stopped a passing ambulance.

"Hurry," he called.

"Come," said Nanine to the German, "help carry him. Be careful! Don't hurt him."

As they started through the door, the boy turned and smiled into his mother's face.

"I'm all right, mother," he said, and they went out to the waiting motor, little Angéle at their heels.

With a feeling of utter hopelessness Marie watched them go, the empty coffee pot in one hand, the plate of bread in the other. All this could mean only one thing. The battle had been lost. Paulette had been too late, or had perished on the way. Before her wide, horror-stricken eyes was a vision of Gerome, dead on the field, his forgiveness lost to her forever.

Madame put a gentle hand on her arm.

"Marie," she said hurriedly, "there is no time to lose." At her words the girl seemed to waken as from a trance.

"No," she cried, "no—no—no!"

"You must come," pleaded her mother-in-law, but the girl shook her head wildly.

"I am not going," she cried. Life, for her, was finished and over. The elder woman tried to urge her, half dragging her through the door as the terrific roar of a shell bursting quite near the château, thundered in their ears, but the girl struggled and broke away.

At that moment the air seemed to split with a deafening explosion, a splintering of glass, a flash of flame. The acrid, bitter smell of powder and smoke was stifling.

Madame staggered against the door as the orderly, his head held low, came running through the courtyard. He grasped her by the hand and dragged her out to the waiting ambulance.

Marie, half fainting, fell on the couch, her head buried deep in the cushions.

Her last conscious thoughts were:

"Let the house fall upon me, the ruins cover me deep! They cannot bury my grief!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

For awhile she lay motionless, half stunned by the force of the explosion. When full consciousness returned to her the firing had grown fainter, more infrequent. She rose to her feet and went to the window. Out in the courtyard a great hole gaped where the shell had struck. Glass from the windows lay scattered about, a garden bench was splintered and overturned. Havoc and ruin stared back at her. Had Madame and the rest escaped? Or had they been killed, and she, alone, left untouched?

She stood in the center of the room, dazed, her fingers clutching nervously, her chin quivering. It seemed years ago that she had arrived here with Gerome to be in the shelter of his home, to be with his people in her hour of need, and now she was alone.

She seemed to see France, like the bleeding body of a woman, lying dead at her feet. Her wild eyes visioned Gerome's white, upturned face, staring vacantly at the sky he loved. She tore at her breast, panting for breath.

"God! God!" she cried. "What have I left in all the world? Why am I not lying out there with Gerome? Gerome, I will not go on without you, I can't!"

She stopped her hysterical crying. Her hands dropped to her sides, her mouth set. She remembered seeing a pistol in the drawer of the little desk when

the General had opened it searching for some papers.

She walked slowly toward it now as though propelled by some force outside of herself. With shaking fingers she pulled open the drawer and for a moment stared down at the weapon. After a hesitating effort she forced herself to pick it up, but the touch of the steel set her trembling.

"It's cold," she shuddered. "It's horrible," and then after a moment she closed her eyes and whispered a prayer for strength.

Her pitiful weakness disgusted her. With nothing left to live for she was even afraid to die. Slowly she raised the pistol to her heart, her eyes tightly shut, her lips pressed in a stiff blue line.

Suddenly she stopped, her eyes sprang open. Footsteps were coming up the path, running, stumbling, heavy footsteps. Marie wheeled, the hand with the pistol hidden behind her back.

Someone came through the outer door and crossed the hall. She backed against the wall, her hand still behind her. The door was kicked open. A man stood on the threshold, dusty, bloody, spent with running. His face was twisted with hate, his lips drawn back from his teeth.

"You!" she breathed, for her wide, frightened eyes were staring straight into the terrible ones of Von Pfaffen.

"You she-devil," his voice was curiously low; "you thought to trick me, didn't you? You thought by giving me the wrong information you'd be rid of me! Do you know what you have done? You have

killed hundreds, thousands of your countrymen. You have sent them to their death in vain!"

She was following his words, shaking, sinking almost to her knees, cringing before the blow she knew was coming.

The man's fury was blinding him. He took a step toward her. She must be tortured for what she had done to him.

"You let me take that information to my superiors," he cried hoarsely; "they acted upon it. You brought ruin to my cause, disgrace to me. My career is ended. Did you imagine you could deceive me and no harm come to you?"

In Marie's breast a faint suspicion of what had taken place was awakening. She scarcely dared voice it, even to herself.

"I gave you information," she panted, but Von Pfaffen burst in upon her words with a string of vile oaths.

"But wrong! Wrong!" he shouted. "Twenty miles wrong!"

She lifted her head, a breathless, wondering hope in her eyes.

"And the French have won?"

His face was black.

"Yes, damn them and you!" he swore. She still leaned against the wall, the blood throbbed in her fingers clutching the pistol behind her back, but through her heart surged a wave of joy, of thankfulness. Paulette had been in time!

"Everything has gone wrong," he snarled, "even

that message I sent the other night never reached its destination."

"There was no message sent," she said in a clear, distinct voice.

He stopped in the step he was taking toward her. The look of sheer hatred that burned across his face would have set her cowering with terror at another time, but now, the knowledge that she had helped France, and aided her husband's cause, lifted her above the thought of fear.

"I took that tracing when your back was turned," she went on in the same clear voice. "I burned it!"

The man made a sound in his throat as though he were choking, his face turned purple, his brilliant eyes burned with the fury of a maniac.

"You who did that!" he gasped.

She looked at him defiantly.

"Yes, I did it!" she said, "and I knew the information I gave you yesterday was wrong. I sent you to a place twenty miles away from where I knew the attack was to be made. I sent the word after you that warned Sains, that brought victory to my husband's cause!" And then something of the look that had been in Madame's eyes when she had echoed the Marseillaise flashed into her own, and she finished in a ringing voice, "for my own cause!"

Von Pfaffen was quite close to her now. The veins in his neck were swollen and throbbing, the whites of his eyes shot with little lines of red. There were spatters of foam in the corners of his thin lips.

"So that's what you did!" he hissed. "You devil! I'll make you wish you had never been born! I'll make

your husband, if he is still alive, despise you! I'll make his people turn you out of their house! I'll make your own people shoot you as a spy if ever you cross their border."

She was watching him like a cat watches a vicious, brutal dog that she knows is going to spring as soon as he has finished worrying her. Her teeth were tearing at her under lip, the fingers of her free hand picked at her gown. Why didn't he kill her and end it all, she wondered? His nearness sent a wave of sickening nausea surging over her. The blood was pounding in her ears. His words came to her through it all.

"I'll force you into the streets where you belong," he shouted in her face.

Her eyes narrowed.

"If my husband were here," she said slowly, "he would kill you for that!"

Von Pfaffen flung a vile oath at her.

"When your husband sees you again," he said, "if he ever does, it will be to find you dead, and glad of it!"

Marie laughed a clear, ringing laugh, cold and absolutely mirthless.

"Do you think I fear death?" she said. "If my husband comes back I am going to tell him everything, and when he knows the truth he will kill you like a rat."

The man stopped and looked at her a moment, insolently, arrogantly.

"Oh, no, he won't," he said, quite calmly; "I've planned differently."

"What do you mean?" she whispered.

"Do you think you are going to leave this room alive?"

"I'm not afraid of death!"

He looked at her venomously.

"You're not afraid," he sneered. "Do you know what I am going to do?" His eyes were so evil that she cringed back against the protecting wall. "After I have killed you, I am going to tell your story in my own way," his meaning was only too plain.

"You devil," she whispered. A wave of red surged up staining her white throat and pale face.

A horrible smile broadened his wicked mouth. He had touched her.

"There will be more than one man concerned in the story I shall tell."

"You know that's a lie!"

He laughed.

"How do I know? There may have been a dozen before I found you."

So that was what he would tell Gerome, that would be his revenge!

"You coward!" she panted; "you monster! I'm glad you failed! Thank God your cause has failed; I——"

Beside himself with rage, he sprang toward her, clutching his hands about her throat.

"You're glad, are you?" he hissed; "you're glad!"

She struggled in his grasp. Suddenly there was a flash, a sharp report, then breathless silence.

For a moment the man stared horribly into her eyes, his hands at her throat clutched spasmodically

once, twice, almost shutting away her breath before they loosened. He coughed, a queer, sputtering cough, straightened his thin shoulders jerkily, and then grotesquely spun about and fell sprawling to the floor, where he lay quiet.

Marie looked down at the smoking pistol that hung in her limp hand. She stared at it fascinated as though seeing it for the first time.

He had fallen quite close to the threshold of the door and keeping her eyes carefully averted from his sprawled body she walked slowly over to the little desk.

Scarcely realizing what she was doing, she placed the pistol in the drawer and covered it up with papers; then she shut the drawer and securely locked it. Her mind was curiously numb, as she turned and looked down at the dead man.

For a moment she swayed irresolutely, then with a supreme effort went over to where he lay. Shuddering, her whole soul revolting at her task, she stooped and dragged the body across the threshold and out into the hall.

He was a horrible sight. The sneer of hate had frozen on his face. His eyes stared wide, and his coat hunched about his shoulders where she had clutched it in dragging him through the door.

With a stifled scream she ran back into the salon, closing and locking the door; then she turned, leaning against the barrier between herself and what had been her evil genius.

"Thank God," she cried, "I'm free!"

CHAPTER XXXIX

When there has been a shade or promise of evil hanging over our lives, when we have waked each morning with the dread of what the day may bring, and go to bed at night to toss and turn in fear of the morrow, and then, suddenly, we find that the thing we feared has happened, instead of the appalling terror and the horror of its consequences that we anticipated, very often there is a sense of infinite relief, that now no worse can come, for the worst has happened.

So it was with Marie. With the closing and locking of the door on the dead body of Von Pfaffen, a great, numb calmness enveloped her. He was dead. She had killed him. Nothing mattered. There was nothing to matter. The world, for her, was finished. She wondered in a curious subconscious way why she did not care. She had taken a human life, yet she felt no remorse, no fear. All emotion was dead in her heart. She only knew that she was tired, terribly tired. Her knees seemed to give way under her. She stumbled, dragged herself with the help of her icy hands, hanging onto the chairs, groping along the edge of the table. She only knew she must reach the couch, which seemed so far away, where she could rest. Her mouth was dry, her tongue felt swollen. It was an effort to close or raise the heavy lids over her burning eyes. A dreadful sense of dizzy nausea struck her. Suffocating waves of blackness

seemed to beat up from her heart and surge across her vision.

With a supreme effort she made a last tottering step toward the haven she was trying to reach, and pitched headlong across the couch, a great darkness wrapping her close.

The day wore on, the cannonading had rumbled off into silence, the frightened birds had come back, and here and there, through the garden, they twittered nervously to one another.

The sky was overcast now, the air had grown heavy with the promise of a storm. Every now and then a little gust of wind, pungent with the smell of powder, blew in along the terrace and through the shattered windows. It shook the curtains, fluttered across the unconscious head of the woman, lifted a lock of disheveled hair, eddied among the papers on the little desk, stirred about the disordered room and died away.

Marie was mercifully shut away from the world, her strained nerves had snapped. She could bear no more.

Outside in the hall, behind the locked door, the dead man lay, staring horribly, a tiny stream of blood staining the marble floor.

* * * *

When Gerome jumped from his dusty, battered motor, late in the afternoon, it was with a heart full of foreboding that he found the great gates open. The terrible havoc wrought by the bursting shell frightened him. He dared not ask himself what he might find.

He hurried up the gravel walk, his head splitting and pounding from a gash across his brows, which had been bound up hastily. His face was grimy, and there were discolored circles about his eyes. He ran along the terrace and past the entrance door, knowing he would find whoever was left in the house here, in the little salon.

At the window he paused, his quick eye took in the disorder, the signs of the struggle, the body of the girl lying inert across the couch, her dress crumpled and torn, her yellow hair, loose from its pins, hanging in a long loop over her shoulder. With a cry he ran across to her and lifted her in his arms.

"Marie," he cried, but her head fell back heavily against his breast.

Gently he laid her down on the cushions, a dreadful fear in his heart that this might mean death. The bowl of water and the bandages that had been brought for Jacques were on the table. Hastily he wet a cloth, and kneeling by the girl's side brushed back the hair from her brow and moistened her closed eyes and lips.

Presently she stirred, her lids fluttered.

"Marie darling!" he said. "Tell me, what is it?"

The girl opened her eyes and looked into his.

"Gerome," she whispered, "is it really you?" Her eyes were devouring him hungrily, lovingly, the man she had never hoped to see again.

Suddenly she became conscious of the bandage around his head.

"Gerome!" she cried, "you are hurt!"

"It's nothing," he hastened to assure her, "only a

scratch. I have glorious news! We have won! It's victory for France!"

"Victory!" she repeated dully, then after a moment, "God is good to us!"

He drew her to him tenderly.

"I had word that mother and the servants were safe," he said, "but when I learned that you were not with them, I was mad with fear that you might be injured. I got leave to come and find you, and thank God, I have!"

He had come back to her, but it was too late, her hands were stained with blood. An overwhelming sense of what she had lost swept over her. She turned her face against his sleeve, weeping hopelessly.

"Hush, dearest," he whispered, "luck was with us, don't you hear? We struck just where the enemy's lines were weakest. Our aviators reported them massing their troops at Sains, but the attack there was a complete failure. The town must have been warned!"

Sains had been warned!

That was something to weigh against the heavy burden of sorrow she had to bear!

Holding her close he listened, while she told him of their experience in the château during the battle, and then for a long while they sat silent, their arms about one another, cheek against cheek. Death had been so close to both, might take one of them tomorrow, but he had her now in his arms, warm, palpitating, trembling with the love he knew was for him.

The light began to fade, the silence broken only by the distant muttering of the guns.

"Little Sainte Marie," he whispered, "to me you are symbolic of everything that is good and pure!"

Across Marie's mental vision flashed the picture of Von Pfaffen's body lying out beyond the locked door. He was dead. There was no need that anyone should ever know of her past with him. Everyone else who knew was dead. Her word would be sufficient. She had only to say that she had discovered him to be a spy; that he had come back and, finding her alone, attacked her, and in defense of her honor, she had killed him.

She had sinned, yet she had suffered. Had she not paid the price in full? Must she drain the cup of bitterness to the last dregs? Surely heaven did not expect this sacrifice. Would it not make Gerome more unhappy to know the truth? Would it not, indeed, be wrong of her to confess? It was written, "Let the dead past bury its dead!" Why draw this grizzly skeleton into the light of day? She had suffered enough. She wanted happiness, and to tell Gerome meant to crucify that happiness. Surely, other women in the past had erred and then married and lived contentedly, without discovery or confession. She had been so young, so innocent, so unprepared. It was her inexperience that was to blame, not she herself. In heart she had always been pure, her desire had always been to be good. Her conscience acquitted her. Her decision was made. She would not tell.

Gerome's eyes held hers. At all costs she must

keep the love she saw shining there. She answered his look with one of passionate adoration.

"Marie," he said softly, "thank God that you are safe. I dare not even imagine what it would have meant to me if I had come back and found anything had happened to you."

There was a long silence.

"How wonderful it is," he said at last, "to have an ideal realized. You are everything I ever dreamed a woman should be. If I should die to-morrow, it would be with the knowledge that the woman I loved had been worthy of my implicit faith."

Faith! The word sank into her heart. It stirred and brought to life again, conscience. What was it to have implicit faith? How did one deserve that?

He looked gravely into her eyes.

"All human happiness is founded on faith!" he said.

He believed in her. Oh, God, the pity of it! He believed in her, and how had she repaid his trust?

She had hidden her past from him, and lived a lie all these days of her marriage, in order to shield herself and keep his faith in her.

To tell him meant to lose his love. But could she go on like this, living a lie? How glorious, how beautiful it would be, what inexpressible joy, if she only were the woman he thought her. If she only had come to him with clean hands. If the exchange had only been equal. But the fact that this was not so, could not be eradicated. She was what she was, what circumstances had made her. She knew that she was cheating him. Again, she brought her soul

before the judgment bar of her conscience, and this time the verdict was "Guilty!"

Cost what it may, she must tell him.

The pitiful weakness of her character that had made her drift, postponing the inevitable day of reckoning, had passed. She must flay her very soul, and stand before him as she was.

She became conscious of his voice telling the story of the battle, of his love for her, of their future happiness.

Their future happiness!

"Gerome," she said slowly, her voice vibrant with suppressed emotion, "there is something I must tell you, something I have been too cowardly to let you know before. I'm tired of lying! Tired of hiding! Ashamed of accepting your love, when I know it is undeserved. I am not what you think me!"

He looked at her, startled.

"Marie——" he began.

"No—don't stop me," she said quietly, but firmly, "let me tell you everything. When you married me you thought me a pure young girl, coming to you from the convent, untouched by the world. I wasn't —I—there was another man in Vienna."

He clutched her arm in a grip that made her wince with pain.

"What do you mean?" His voice was hoarse and strange.

She drew away from him.

"I knew you would shrink from me! I knew you would loathe me when you learned the truth. I'm not trying to exonerate myself, not trying to make ex-

cuses. I was young, scarcely more than a child. I told you I had never known my mother. When my father died, I was left penniless, without friends, without the knowledge of how to support myself. I was unused to the fight, unequal to it. One day I met a man who singled me out, a smile on his lips, black lies in his heart. He promised me what I longed for, protection, a home, marriage—and I believed him!"

Her words swept over Gerome in a devastating wave, leaving his face livid. The bandage across his forehead reddened with the fresh bleeding of his wound.

"Go on," he whispered hoarsely, "tell me everything!"

"He found me singing in a little Bohemian café; it was the only thing I could do to earn my living. He befriended me, was kind to me, and before I knew where I was drifting, it had all happened. Too late, I realized what I meant in the scheme of his world, a plaything, a new toy for a day to be tossed aside when my novelty had worn off. When I knew the truth, I left it all. I came to Paris, where I had distant relatives. I threw myself on their mercy. They were good people, as you know. They took me in. I tried to forget! I never wanted to see anything of the old life again. As the months passed I believed myself safe, and then you came," her voice lifted, rang clear; "you, the man I had dreamed of, whom I thought could not exist outside of dreams. All the love, all the passion, all the adoration a woman is capable of, I gave to you. The rest of my life you know, every minute, every thought of it, up to—up

to the day you brought me here. I was so hungry for happiness. You were my world. I couldn't bear to think of losing you. I decided not to tell you. I would make amends in a hundred ways for the deception. I tried to! I thought the past was dead, dead and buried. God, how I deluded myself! When we arrived here, here in your father's home, all the sunshine, all the joy went out of my life, for I came face to face with that man!"

"Here? You're mad!" The gentleness, the refinement had vanished from his expression, leaving the face of primitive man thirsting to get his fingers on the throat of his enemy. "Who is he? Tell me his name!"

She kept her eyes on his.

"He was known in this house as Antoine," she said.

"Antoine!" his lips curled with unutterable loathing, "Antoine! A servant!"

"He was not a servant. He was a spy in the service of the enemy!"

Gerome dropped her arm as though the touch seered his fingers, horror and amazement in his face.

"A spy! Good God! Then what are you?"

She nerved herself. The look in his eyes spelled death for her, but she must go on.

"When I saw him, I was wild with terror. He offered me a price for his silence. I was to get some information he wanted. What was I to do? What could I do? I only knew that I loved you, that I wanted to keep you. I only knew that I was going mad with the fear of losing you! I promised to do what he asked!"

"What was it?" His voice was low, even, deadly. She knew there could be no hope for her, but the oblivion of death would be welcome.

"I made you tell me where the attack was to be made. This was the information he wanted."

He recoiled, his eyes fixed on her with a look of unutterable horror.

"You sold my honor, my country!" he said at last. "You, whom I trusted with more than my life. Well, there's only one thing to do. Both of us must die!" Slowly he drew his pistol, his face cold and white as marble.

"Wait," she whispered. "I'm ready, I'm willing to die, but before, I want you to know everything." He lowered his arm and looked at her. "I knew that if I defied him he would get his information some other way. I knew I must seem to play into his hands, and thwart his purpose. I gave him information, but wrong, twenty miles wrong! It was I who sent the warning to Sains! And I know it reached there in time!"

"How do you know that?"

"Because he told me!"

"Told you? Where? When? Where is he now?" His face worked, his lips were drawn back from his teeth, his voice hoarse with passion.

For a moment she stood rigid, then she stepped to the hall door and threw it open.

"He is here!" she said.

Together they looked at the dead man at their feet. Gerome raised his eyes to hers.

"You——?" he said.

She nodded slowly.

"He came here, just before you did, to be revenged upon me. He said I had deliberately given him the wrong information. He taunted me with the past. He, who had caused it all! He threatened my life, said he would force me out of your arms and into the streets, where I belonged. So I killed him!"

Gerome threw his arm up across his eyes. His shoulders shook with dry sobbing.

"Marie, Marie," he cried. "Oh God! my world lies shattered at my feet!"

"And mine—and mine," she whispered.

CHAPTER XL

Night had fallen, dull, black, the sky overhung with great masses of heavy clouds. Like a ghost of herself Marie sat staring out of the window into the depths of the deserted garden. Still, calm with the calmness that comes after storm, her unseeing eyes gazed straight ahead of her. How long she had sat there she knew not. She was filled with that curious, numb quiet that comes to one when all fear, all hate, all terror has departed. She was resigned to anything fate might decree for her.

When she had told Gerome all the bitter truth, he had left her without a word. Later she had heard vague shuffling sounds in the hall, the closing of the outer door, his steps crunching on the gravel. Her staring eyes had tried vainly to pierce the velvet blackness outside the window. Instinctively she knew what errand had taken him out into the garden. She could almost hear the thud of earth falling on the dead face of Von Pfaffen.

The guns still muttered and boomed, lighting the black horizon with sullen, intermittent flashes. As she sat waiting her whole brief life unfolded before her. The years at the convent, her unhappiness, her struggles with poverty, the tragedy, as she saw it now, of her lost honor, her escape from it all, the new, peaceful life, and then the coming of wonderful happiness, the happiness of requited love, the culmina-

tion of which was the knowledge that she was to be the mother of Gerome's child. She knew that, although she had drained the cup of bitterness and misery to its very dregs, still the pendulum had swung as far the other way. She had had those few short months of supreme joy. The price had been a heavy one. But in the light of retrospection she knew that it was worth it.

Far into the night she sat thinking, dreaming, staring out into the blackness. Then she heard Gerome's step again on the path, heard him stumble in the darkness of the hall. After a moment he came in and sank heavily into a chair. The clouds had lifted, and an ominous red moon had risen, and by its faint light she could see him sitting, his chin in his hands. He was thinking, brooding, comparing. Almost as though he spoke them aloud, she could follow his thoughts.

After the first bitter shock that had sent his idol crashing to earth he had been shaken, frenzied, filled with a curse for God and man. But Marie's voice, as she told him more of her story, had calmed him in spite of himself, and some of the terrible rage and horror he had felt had been laid with the body of his enemy in the grave he had dug in the garden. Alone, by the side of that little mound he had battled with himself, fought as great a fight with his soul as that being waged by his country. It became plain to him that in a small way his problem with this woman who was his wife reflected the mighty struggle going on outside, which was to decide the destiny of nations. It was as though he stood apart and looked down

from some height on a warring world. Clearly the great issues that were at stake rose before him, this terrible war, which was to bring about perpetual peace, establishing now and forever the brotherhood of men, which was to build anew mankind and the arts of civilization, was a baptism of blood out of which would arise a new creation. Through the vision he became aware of the smallness of all things else.

Marie, sitting silently in the chair by the window, timidly broke into his revery, hesitatingly, as one who fears to waken a dreamer.

"Gerome," she whispered, "Gerome!"

Across the silent garden, up from the distant horizon, came a louder roll of guns, a fitful crash of bursting shells, and then silence. He sat motionless, inert, as though he heard only his own thoughts, as though he were deaf to outward sounds.

After a moment she began again:

"I had no one to tell me—no one to advise me. I was alone, more alone than you can ever understand. At first just being happy was a thing so wonderful, I clung to it, desired it above all else in the world. But there was something more than that." Slowly he turned his head toward her. She went on, her voice firmer, steadier, "I realized that another life was to come into the world, for whose happiness I would be responsible! The glory of it—your child!"

Across the mind of the man sitting motionless in his chair flashed something of what she had suffered. This child, the symbol of the love that had seemed so perfect! Perhaps it would be a daughter who must be spared the sorrows, the privations, the lack

of protection, that had been her mother's undoing. He began to see more clearly that in his first wild grief and disappointment in her he had failed to fully understand. She had not succumbed to temptation. What she had done had never attracted her. She had been like one who wanders alone in a wilderness, and who falls a prey to wild beasts, or is overcome by fatigue or hunger. That she had sinned was not her fault, rather it was her misfortune. He became conscious again of her voice, low, vibrant.

"In the beginning I withheld the truth from you because I feared to lose your love. Then when I realized that a new life was to come into the world, I could not bear that our child should know of its mother's guilt. I tried to save it the bitterness that knowledge would bring. Gerome, it was for that!"

His thoughts raced on. She had been tempted, then, not to shield herself, but because of her great love for him, and to save one who was wholly innocent, perhaps a lifetime of unhappiness. He listened while she told him little by little of her starved life, her empty childhood in the colorless walls of the convent, the far-between visits of her father, of those short months of happiness in the little house in the *Blumen Strasse*. Her voice shook a little when she told of her father's illness and his death, and her terror at facing the world penniless and alone. She went over all her short life, her home with the kind old Schultzes, her struggles to find employment, finally, her singing in the café, her meeting with her evil genius.

Sitting there, touched by the soft moonlight,

motionless, calm, without a shadow of the tears that had so long been her refuge, she told her story with the simple directness of a child.

Seeing her, hearing her story in its completeness, realizing some of the pity that Christ must have felt for the penitent Magdalene, more of the bitterness died in Gerome's heart. Had he not, in his blind fury, judged too hastily this woman, whose weakness and ignorance had made her the victim of unscrupulous force and who had kept her sin secret through the generous motive of saving him and his unborn child, sorrow, shame? Perhaps, after all, if regarded in its true light, her soul was as pure as he had believed.

Secure in his own strength, firm in his own knowledge of right and wrong, had he not condemned her too quickly?

The muttering of the guns on the distant horizon again reminded him of the struggle his country was undergoing. If strength could reproach weakness for being overwhelmed by a force greater than itself, then Belgium, ravished, devastated, bleeding Belgium, deserved the reproach of the world, rather than its pity.

The night was lifting; he looked at her silhouetted against the gray square of the window. Her white dress was crumpled and torn, her yellow hair hung loose over her shoulders. She seemed to him a symbol of Belgium, ravished, buffeted, beaten.

The greater part of human unhappiness is the result of misunderstanding. This terrible war, some of the horrors of which were printed indelibly on his soul, had come because of the misunderstanding that

existed between man and his brother. Titanic force in combat with Titanic force simply destroyed itself. If the world was to endure, the great problems of man must be answered by some other means. There would be a New Heaven and a New Earth to take the place of those that had passed away. Out of the ashes of this war must rise a new era. Old traditions were falling away. Superstition with regard to the Divine Right of Kings, that Old Man of the Sea, which mankind had carried on his back for so long, retarding his efforts, using his strength and substance, would be cast aside forever, and with the freedom of unimpeded, reborn youth, man would rise to that plane of development which was to fulfill his destiny.

Surely then, since the life and history of each individual was a world in itself, he and this woman who was his wife could begin again, awaken into a resurrection that would break the shackles of prejudice and tradition and with that mutual understanding which comes after such a storm as that through which they had passed, work out their destinies with a more certain knowledge of the things in life which really make for happiness.

He rose to his feet and came and stood before her. Silently she waited, motionless, still. Her sentence was about to be pronounced. She was ready.

"Listen," he said at last; "out there the old world is destroying itself in a flood of fire and hate. Old ideals are passing away. Ambition, greed, love, even hope itself is tottering into nothingness."

Hopelessly she echoed his words.

"Nothingness!"

"Marie, I have been thinking all night, and because of the sorrow and suffering through which I have gone, things seem clearer than ever before. My rage has been terrible. My unhappiness almost unbearable. When you told me what you had done, I thought life was not worth living another day. I had determined that both of us must die. But all that has passed away. After this great struggle which is going on between the nations of the earth is over, something new and better must come. Shall we be part of it, begin life afresh, and see if, after all, there is not some happiness left for us?"

Her face was transfigured with a great light.

"You can say that to me?" she asked.

He took both her hands in his, his voice gentle, through his suffering and hers.

"Shall there be a resurrection that shall be built on perfect understanding?"

"Gerome," she whispered.

The vigil he had kept with his soul through this long and terrible night, the task he had made for himself when he buried Von Pfaffen's body in the garden, the knowledge of her ordeal, of her lifting of herself above the weakness that had threatened to engulf her, the strength that had made her confess when there had been no need of confession, had shown him what the new life for both of them might mean.

"A resurrection," he went on, "where it shall be clear that the world can live only so long as love shall live."

She lifted her eyes to his.

" 'Love shall wipe away all tears,' " she whispered, almost as though she were uttering a prayer.

Gerome held her hands against his breast.

"You and I, dear," he said earnestly, "shall we start anew, and when we reach the far horizon look back on this hour as a story that is told? For to understand all is to forgive all!"

The traces of her bitter suffering were still on her face, but she looked at him happily.

"An hour ago," she said softly, "I thought I had nothing left to live for, but the doors of life are just opening. Look——" Together they turned toward the window.

Toward the West, the clouds hung black and ominous, the last draperies of departing night, from whence came the persistent thunder of the guns, where men strove, destroying the old world in a hell of blood and steel. But on the Eastern horizon, turning all the hills to ruddy gold, was the rising sun.

Somewhere in a hidden thicket a bird twittered on its nest.

She looked up into his face, the light of her great love shining in her eyes, and whispered almost as though it were a prophecy:

"I can see the light of a new day!"

THE END

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